

SPOUSAL EDUCATIONAL GAP AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV) RISK ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

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Abstract

The paper discussed the association between the education level of inequality, the educational difference between spouses, and the likelihood of life course intimate partner violence (IPV) in the context of the socio-economic situation in Abia State, Nigeria. Using qualitative data, on 24 participants. The study investigated the level and orientation to which educational variations contributed to marital behavior, conflict and most probably IPV. On the one hand, the findings indicate that educational disparities have had certain differences based on the life stage of couples: the younger couples tend to have more tensions in the relationships in case they have one, particularly in early marriages, and that they are frequently supplemented by childbearing, dreadful job and financial limitations. However, the marriage after a certain age has been found to adapt more, as the life experience makes the differences in education less sensitive as a source of conflict. However, unemployment and economic instability wherever it thrives enhance risk factors of IPV. The present study demonstrates that to achieve effective IPV interventions, it is necessary to engage in multi-level approaches that would foster educational equity, undermine damaging gender norms, and increase economic empowerment.

Keywords: Educational gap, Intimate partner violence, Life-course influence, Educational intervention.

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a global issue in its populace, cultures, socio-economic status, and even age not only regarding the human rights aspect but also regarding the community health (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). The reasons that lead to IPV are diverse, and one of the elements of them is social, economic, cultural, and relationship motivation. Education out of this has emerged as one of the primary factors that influence both vulnerability and resistance to IPV (Vyas & Watts, 2009). The safeguarding impact of education and education of women in particular has been recurrently mentioned and communicated, yet the differences in education amidst married people have not gathered such focus among researchers, despite the fact that the educational disparity between married couples might be another factor which influences the relationship process and power equilibrium through the life cycle (Abramsky et al., 2011).

The difference between the education levels of married couples is referred to as the spousal educational gap. This imbalance can influence the process of decision-making in the household, income distribution, and gender roles (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). In case the education level of a male spouse is well beyond that, the foundations of such a traditional patriarchal society may be reinforced, the acceptance of male

power and dominance. However, in instances where the woman surpasses the man in terms of education, the roles reversal may pose a threat to the established and accepted gender roles and the outcome is usually confrontation and violence due to the need to reclaim the control (Jewkes, 2002). This tension may be of various forms and degrees at the different lifespan of marriage as a result of economic shift in responsibilities, child bearing and health condition among others.

The paper at hand adopts life course perspectives in describing the interplay between spousal educational differences and the exposure to the risk of IPV among individuals through their lifetime. This approach recognizes that relationships can be altered overtime and that the vulnerabilities of relationships or the protective factors can vary with age or with the duration of a union or socioeconomic fluctuations (Elder, 1994). To provide an example, the issue of power negotiation at the initial stages of life in the marriage may be influenced by the differences in the educational level but at the later stages of the conflict, the conflict and the escalation, the difference in the stress factors or the ways of coping with the stress factors that the couple spent together may influence the problem.

Given that the IPV is intricate and the impact of educational disparities between spouses in a couple life course is complicated, the current research investigates the relationship between the spousal educational gap and the risk of IPV at diverse life stages. When examining this association, the analysis will be in a position to offer guided interventions that will consider the time and context of IPV with the view of promoting more effective prevention interventions of educational equality and gender-friendly orientations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

It is commonly known that education is one of the determinants of the risk and dynamics of intimate partner violence (IPV). Nevertheless, the evidence indicated that its effects were not directly related to the absolute educational levels only; instead, the differences between the educational levels of the spouses also known as the spousal educational disparity were also a powerful determinant of relationship outcomes (Vyas & Watts, 2009). The discrepancy in the educational degree of a husband and a wife (i.e. husband more educated than wife or vice versa) is called spousal educational disparity. Such gender variations influence power sharing, household communication and decision making that has been seen to be acceptable predictors of IPV (Jewkes, 2002; Abramsky et al., 2011).

Research studies conducted globally have made inconclusive links between IPV and the difference in education. Indicatively, in most patriarchal cultures, women who had lower educational levels than their husbands were identified to be at a greater risk of IPV, in most cases, because of the economic reliance and a weak bargaining power in the household (Aizer, 2010). Conversely, women that are more educated than their men are linked with greater illumination and can dismantle the doors of gender inequality, thus causing a backlash effect of men becoming violent to restore order (Bhana & Anderson, 2013). But, as it has been found regarding educational disparities in 20 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) countries, high but inverted education gaps can be attributed to the potential to have more IPV, depending on culture and socio-economic conditions (Ackerson et al., 2008).

These complications find their way into Nigeria. The findings of the study of the 2018 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) demonstrate that the probability of overall IPV is statistically significantly lower among women with higher education level, but this protection is lost or even reversed in case of women having higher education level than the husband (Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014).

The results of the research on the South-West and South-East geopolitical areas have provided a sign that couples with the equal level of education experience the lowest percentages of IPV, and that education equality also serves to balance the power dynamics and create respect (Okenwa-Emegwa et al., 2016). With the hypogamous unions, however, the likelihoods of risk are far greater, and that is particularly in the rural community where gender roles are more rigorous (Isiugo-Abanihe & Akinyemi, 2017).

Life-course perspectives also offer a further detail, and show that the role of spousal educational disparity on IPV may evolve over the course of time. Though in early marriage education the differences can indeed influence household roles negotiation and decision making, the economic pressures or reversals of roles (e.g. wife is the main earner) can add to the agony (Elder, 1994). Moreover, the occurrence of socio-economic changes can make educational disparities even greater when it comes to predicting the risk of IPV (Aizer and Dal B, 2009).

Despite this knowledge, there are enormous gaps in literature. Longitudinal studies are also insufficient in Nigeria and therefore deficiency of understanding of the processes and time causality. Further, most of the studies deal with the factor of women, but little is seen in terms of the perception of men towards the impact of educational inequality on relationship power and conflict. Moreover, there are minimal qualitative research studies that explore the experiences of the lives that are behind the correlated problems that exist in statistics. Sealing the observed gaps through a mixed-method would help in formulating interventions that would facilitate the gender equity agenda that puts into account the socio-cultural reality of the Nigerian families.

2.1.2 Educational Intervention on Intimate Partner Violence

It has been detailed how education is a pivotal social determinant on life opportunities, attitudes, and behavior of the actors, and how it is interrelated with intimate partner violence (IPV) has also been articulated in a fair share of literature. People tend to argue that in low, middle-income, and high-income environments, positive educational attainment is usually connected with the reduced risk to become a victim of IPV, and the connection between the problem is complex and mediated by economic, social, and normative circumstances (Vyas and Watts, 2009; Abramsky et al., 2011).

One of the primary mechanisms on education that is correlated with a reduced risk of IPV is possible because of economic autonomy. The education enhances the grade of posts that women achieve in the employment sector that increases their bargaining mechanisms at home and reduces material dependency on their suppressive partners (Aizer, 2010). Female empowerment in the economy tended to make women better positioned to exit abusive relationships, seek legal or health-related services and social support networks (Vyas & Watts, 2009). Education also empowered people with knowledge and cognitive ability of how to constructively deal with problems, handle conflicts without violence and be conscious of the rights and support systems they have (Heise, 2011).

Other than economic pathways, education could influence gender attitudes, and social norms. This is because both women and men view the ideas of gender roles more egalitarianly due to the effects of schooling; this factor can contribute to the attenuation of acceptance of violence as a handy course of control (Jewkes, 2002). There is also intergenerational outcomes where more-educated parents are less able to

accept the normalization of domestic violence which may pre-determine low IPV infrastructures in the long-run (Barker et al., 2011).

However, education does not necessarily cushion evenly. Women education is not always the solution to the IPV problem in a number of studies because it depends on the societal norms and the relationships between partners. An example of this is a population-based study in India that revealed that women with higher education levels than their husbands were more likely to be affected by IPV than women with higher education levels, and their relative deficiencies could raise the risk (Ackerson et al., 2008). In the same way, a recent investigation in Bangladesh showed that the protective power of education was compromised in the society in which the IPV-justifying norms were embedded, which means that the societal attitudes can erase the advantages of female education (Sultana et al., 2025). Hospital-based statistics in Botswana also found no significant correlation between education levels of women and the occurrence of IPV, which confirms the view that structural issues like unemployment and economic dependence could be more significant than the level of education (Phetlho-Thekisho and Habedi, 2008). In a patriarchal society where conventions are strong, the proliferation of women schooling minus the requisite alteration in the mindset of the men can generate resistance to the point that the male species respond to the menacing status of equality by resorting to dominance and overuse of violence (Bhana & Anderson, 2013; Jewkes, 2002). Data gathered through the Demographic and Health Survey show that in some settings, higher education of the women is very protective and in some it is weak or dependent on the local gender norms and terminal economic prospects (Ackerson et al., 2008).

The methodological work points out that interpretation is a bias-filled process in the cases where the measurements and reporting have biases. The greater likelihood is in the sense that literate women can recognize and report IPV, thereby giving RDLs, which may result in fallacious cross-sectional correlates unless analysis is performed to control absenteeism in the case studies (Garcfa-Moreno et al., 2015). Therefore, mixed-methods studies and so-called longitudinal studies are necessary to trace causal routes, in addition to broken down economic, normative, or relational processes through which education causes IPV.

Finally, the discovery has assisted in informing intervention researches that education-based policies could achieve success through the implementation of gender-transformative programming. Gender equal curriculum in school, school based activities on living skills, and gender equal curriculum on staying in school, can also help reduce the risks of early marriages, and future victimization by any partner (Barker et al., 2011). However, the expansion of such interventions should be based on structural hurdles (poverty, labor markets), the means to involve men to avoid backlash.

Summarily, the literature indicates that education is an important protective factor against IPV through economical empowerment, norm transition and agency enhancement. All the effects are, however, not generalizable and the impacts are influenced by the dynamics of the partner, community norms and the context of the policies and the intervention needs to be integrated as integrated access to education and gender-transformative and economic empowerment.

2.1.3 Life-Course Influence

Life-course perspective offers a powerful means of relishing how aggregations of events, happenings within the social environment, and interrelated connections determine the manner in which individual lives are

formed throughout time (Elder, 1994). These most significant of these principles include (1) trajectories (long term patterns of behavior and occupancy of roles), (2) transitions (Occupancy changes in the present like marriage or having a child), (3) timing (Age of occupancy change), (4) linked lives (dependence of family and social networks on each other), and (5) historical time and place (influences of cohort and historical time) (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe, 2003)..

The life-course approach elucidates the pace and significance of the educational inequalities amid the marital partners and the educational changes at various periods in the life course and the relative education voyage of the couple concerning IPV risk. Education can be considered to work either as a status course i.e. education can influence employment, income and social networks and an asset that can have an influence on attitudes and coping skills (Kuh and Ben-Shlomo, 2004). Young ages of high educational achievements can lead to a path of higher economic independence and more egalitarian gender attitudes which reduce risk of IPV, but educational or occupational mobility in adulthood (e.g. the acquisition of higher education or higher paid jobs by a woman than her partner) can likely alter power relations at home and in some countries, cause a backlash (Capaldi et al., 2012).

The principle of linked lives presupposes the interdependence of partners in the course of life: the level of education or employment of one partner affects the economic safety of a couple, its decision-making behavior, and are subjected to stress, the last three of which are the direct causes of IPV (Elder et al., 2003). The loss of a job by a husband or a sudden rise in the education level of a woman is an example, and that can be considered a turning point and reduce or accommodate the threat of violence according to social norms, and the provision of support. It may matter when, the ability to negotiate authority and roles might initially vary with gaps being higher than when attempts to negotiate status were made at a later time which might trigger renegotiation of status with possibly different changes in IPV consequences.

The second important characteristic of a life-course research is the concept of cumulative disadvantage of small disadvantages, which, however, increases over time to create large gaps in outcomes. Applying to IPV, childhood risks like poverty, low educational levels and violence exposure may provide avenues that increase risk to future maltreatment, and educational differences in marriage support these risks (Kuh & Ben-Shlomo, 2004). Positive turning points including stable employment or gender-transformative community interventions, on the other hand, have a chance to change life trajectories and decrease the risk of IPV.

In methodology, to have the capability of conducting life-course analysis of IPV, an individual would need to embrace the long-term designs, sequence analysis, and multilevel designs, which would support individual developments and couple processes and changing contexts (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Nevertheless, it has few studies with extended time intervals that simulate the path through education and behavioral course of these companions in a societal approach, the large majority of the evidence is cross-sectional or historical, thus limiting the ability to cause and result (Capaldi et al., 2012). Timing and cohort studies based on mixed-methodology and linked-lives, combined with a historical value, would add significantly to the understanding of when and how educational inequalities turn into the root of IPV in the lifespan. The life-course approach contextualizes gaps in spousal education and IPV in historical and contextual processes and attaches importance on the role of trajectories, transitions, and timing to their outcomes. This perspective should point out the opportunities to implement safer and more just

relationships by identifying key points when such relationships are most at risk like pre-union stages or when there are economic shocks.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Intimate Partner Violence and Social Learning Theory

The theory of Social Learning as developed by Albert Bandura (1977) presents a very critical basis of explaining intimate partner violence (IPV) in the context of educational inequality and a spousal difference in education. The theory of Bandura leaves traditional assumptions of behaviorists, pointing to the idea that people are driven by the effect of the direct reinforcement as well as observation, imitation, and modeling. People learn and develop behaviors through observation especially through the influential people like parents, peers, teachers, and leaders of groups. Such behaviors are reinforced, positively or negatively, when this occurs, and becomes internalized which is repeated in subsequent interactions.

The Social Learning Theory applied to the IPV case indicates that violence is frequently passed on to the next generation. When one grows up in a family where violence is seen as a conflict-based tool, there is a higher probability of the growing individual adopting the same as a norm in intimate relationships (Gelles, 1980; Bandura, 1986). An example that can be used is a man who watched his father control his mother by use of violence might choose to apply the same methods when his marriage is under pressure particularly in cases where there are discrepancies in education which may pose a perceived danger to his dominance. In this respect, IPV is not an individual pathology issue, but a socially acquired behavior, which prospers in the world where violence is tolerated, justified, or rewarded.

Using the Social Learning Theory to educational inequality between spouses, it is obvious that education was a key factor in exposing an individual to, and accepting violence norms. Education has a twofold aspect, there is protective issue and vulnerability depending on the relational and cultural context. The more educated a person, the more chances to obtain the information concerning gender equality, human rights, and the strategies of the non-violent conflict resolution (Jewkes, 2002). In contrast, in a situation where a husband is less educated than his wife, he will feel that her educational level is a threat to the conservative gender stereotypes and male hegemony. This perceived loss of status in a patriarchal society like Nigeria where masculine power is highly institutionalized is likely to cause violent reactions especially when the man has been socialised through observation that violence is a large scale way of reestablishing authority (Aihie, 2009).

Bandura (1977) puts a lot of emphasis on reinforcement to sustain learned behavior. The cultural norms, peer pressure and even institutional reactions in most of the African settings support male domination and female subjugation (Uthman et al., 2009). Unless violent actions are punished by the state or even condoned by the community, there is a high probability that people will keep engaging in IPV. In the case of younger couples, the dynamics can be especially strong. The insecurities can be more problematic early in marriage, then combined with childbearing responsibilities and unemployment, and financial crisis. Absence of coping strategies and dependence on socially acquired patterns of supremacy can result in increased risk of IPV.

Conversely, the Social Learning Theory also offers a voice into the process of adaptation that was seen among older couples in the study. As people grow older and become experienced, violence behavior can

be unlearned and substituted with better coping mechanisms. Exposure to new role models, social networks change, and community norm change can be helpful in this transformation. Therefore, early marital life could be defined by the increased sensitivity to the difference of education, whereas the late age could result in the resilience and decreased dependence on the violent behaviors. This is the life-course perspective that is reflected in the current study.

Social Learning Theory brings into the limelight the processes by which IPV gets enforced in intimate relationships characterized by educational inequalities. It brings out the significance of the implication of society, culture, and role modeling in shaping the element of marital behavior. With the spousal educational inequality placed in the context of this theoretical framework the study is able to display how the IPV develops not only due to individual frustrations, but also due to social processes that justify violence as a means of influence.

2.2.2 Educational Inequality and the Resource Theory

Social Learning Theory concentrates on the process of violent behavior transmission by modeling, though, Resource Theory (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) is a complementary approach that pays attention to the structural and relational factors of marital power relations. Resource Theory states that power in intimate relationships is shared based on resources that each partner contributes to the marital union. Such resources are material resources (income, wealth, property), symbolic resources (education, occupational prestige), and social resources (status, networks). The partner with more resources to bring to a relationship is the one with higher bargaining power, power over choices and direction the household takes as stated by Blood and Wolfe.

Education is not just a personal quality in Nigerian scenario, but it is a potent source which is able to determine the chances of employment, earning power, prestige in society and even cultural capital (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2004). Asymmetries in resource allocation, consequently, are educational disparities between wives and husbands, and they tend to disrupt the conventional power relations in marriages. To illustrate, where men are better educated than the women, they will tend to have increased chances of controlling household decisions which is a cultural expectation as well as a control of resources. Yet, in situations where women are more educated than their spouses, the tension might arise when the resource relations clash with the deeply rooted gender roles according to which the male power is superior.

The theories of IPV include the resource Theory which forms the view of IPV being the possible effect of threatened imbalance of resources. The male superiority expectations are threatened by a woman having better education or economic conditions, and as a result, men can become violent because they have to compensate them with violence (Goode, 1971). This is especially true in such societies as Nigeria where males are extremely patriarchal and the notion of authority is closely relevant to male identity inside the family (Makama, 2013). In such a way, the IPV may be viewed as an effort to regain the balance of power through force in case the resource inequality does not favor the man.

Socioeconomic conditions also define the dynamics that are emphasized by the Resource Theory. The research results that include financial limitation and unemployment as aggravating factors of IPV are consistent with this theory. Poverty lowers material assets that men have conventionally employed in obtaining hegemony in households. In cases when men cannot perform the provider roles because of

unemployment or under-employment, they can feel vulnerable to authority, particularly when the level of education or economic position of their wives is higher than their own (Jewkes et al., 2015). In these circumstances, violence can be used as a symbolic capital that is used to regain dominance without having a material or educational advantage.

Resource Theory on the other hand also explains adaptive patterns which are observed in later marriages. With time, couples can devise the ways of negotiating educational and economic differences without necessarily engaging in violence. Aged spouses might emphasize more on cooperation, shared responsibility and emotional intimacy and thereby diminish the importance of educational differences. The relationships and threat of educational inequality can be put in check by life experience, accumulated resources like family networks, social respect or joint investments.

Notably, the Resource Theory also emphasizes the multi-dimensional nature of power and resources. Education is not a standalone process but it relates with other determinants, e.g. income, employment, cultural expectations and gender norms. The high rate of IPV in the conditions of unemployment and vulnerability, as noted in the study, is a manifestation of the interaction of the lack of resources and increasing the level of insecurity. Therefore, education as a protective resource has an outcome that has to be clarified in the larger economic and cultural contexts.

Concerning intervention, the Resource Theory dictates that only education equity might not be adequate in reducing IPV. Instead, the economic empowerment, employment opportunities, and gender norm restructuring that confine the male identity as exclusively dominant should also be seen as the solution. The policies that allow men and women to distribute the resources in a fair and cooperative way like joint financial planning, gender-sensitive jobs, and community education would help to decrease the probability of IPV because of a tendency to demonstrate the need to dominate by using violence.

2.2.3 Integrative Perspective

Resource Theory and Social Learning Theory provide a sound platform on which the interplay between spousal educational inequality and IPV can be analyzed. Social Learning Theory underlines how violent behavior is conditioned and reinforced, and Resource Theory underlines how the dynamic of power and resource distribution happened in the relationships of intimacy. Both hypotheses have an intersection point as to why younger couples living with a lack of education and economic stress are more susceptible to IPV, and older couples are more resilient. They also complement the necessity of multi-level actions that can not only increase access to education but also change cultural values and enhance economic stability.

3. Methodology

The research design adopted was the qualitative research design to unveil the relationship between education disparity in spouses and the likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV) throughout the lifespan in the state of Abia in Nigeria. The existence of socio-cultural, economic and educational relationships is what drives the study of Spousal Educational Gap and Risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Across the Life Course to determine various factors that can influence marital relationships in Abia state. The Abia State of Nigeria is a rural and urban state that is the common practice of the traditional standards of gender and patriarchal family structures, which may affect the status and demands in marriages in regard to unequal allocation of afterlife (Okorie & Anugwom, 2019). These norms may also add to the impact of education

disparity between two spouses, and there might be the probability of having an influence on the instruments of power and becoming more vulnerable to IPV. The necessity to understand the dynamics of the relationships between the constructs of the socio-cultural environment that IPV takes place in within the context of differentiation between spouses at the educational level preconditioned the choice of the qualitative approach that would facilitate the development of a holistic view of the way the participants live, perceive the world, and tell their stories as they do.

The population of the research study was married/ex-married men and women of the Abia state who were aged 18 years and above. These also had individuals with a broad socio-economic, educational and occupational range to ensure that they would introduce different perspectives. The study more specifically focused on the communities of the three senatorial areas of Abia state, which include Abia North, Abia central and Abia South because they are both urban and rural areas where access to education and living with IPV might have different experiences. The potential participants were identified through the purposive sampling method because it focused on finding participants who had a first-hand experience or information regarding the differences in the education of spouses and IPV. There were 24 participants that were of the proportion 12 female and 12 males who were used to represent a wide range of opinions due to their gender and variety of opinions. The data were collected under the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews and this gave the flexibility of probing and clarification of the answers. Interviews were conducted using English or local language (Igbo) of choice as per the wishes of the participant and were taped using audio tapes with their consent. The data analysis was based on the thematic analysis that was reported by Braun and Clarke (2006), which has four steps such as transcription, coding, identification of the emerging themes, and interpretation. NVivo software was used to control and categorize the data to ensure that the qualitative data is handled in a systematic way. The study also had an ethical approval and assured the participants of their anonymity and their right of not participating in the study in the event that they wished to do so at any time during the research.

4. Findings

4.1 Socio-demographics of the respondents

The sample used in the research was 24 individuals whose socio- demographic background was heterogeneous in relation to age, marital, educational, occupation and income. With reference to the age, 6 (25.0%), 8 (33.3%), 7, (29.2%) and 3 (12.5) of the sample fell in the age category of 18-25 years, 26-35 years, 36-45 years and 45 years and above respectively. It was described based on marital status and it was found that 17 (70.8 %) were married, 4 (16.7 %) single, 2 (8.3%) were divorced or separated and 1 (4.2 %) were widowed.

Regarding the level of education, 7 respondents (29.2) went through high school education, 8 (33.3) had tertiary education, 6 (25.0) had passed the primary education and 3 (12.5) were illiterates. The evidence indicated by observation of the educational difference between spouses revealed that 10 (41.7) of the spouses had difference in the educational level that varied with the wives than with the husbands, 8 (33.3) of the spouses had no difference classical to the educational level of spouses and in 6 (25.0) of the spouses the wives had a higher educational level as compared to the husbands.

In the occupational choice, 9 (37.5) respondents practiced in informal sector, which included petty trading, manual labour 6 (25.0) respondents were civil servants, 5 (20.8) respondents were artisans and 4 (16.7)

respondents were not employed. Regarding the income distribution per month, 8 participants (33.3) had a monthly income that was below the national minimum wage, 7 (29.2) had a monthly income that was between 30,000 and 50,000, 5 (20.8) had a monthly income that was between 51,000 and 80,000 and 4 (16.7) had a monthly income that was above 80,000. Concerning residential location, 15 (62.5) were in urban areas and 9 (37.5) in the rural areas. On religions; 79.2 percent of the respondents were Christians with 16.7 percent being Muslims and 4.2 percent having other religions.

4.2 Unequal achievement levels

The researchers demonstrate that couples with a strong educational gap especially in cases where the wife had lower educational levels than the husband had had high IPV rates. This was shown by the qualitative data of Abia South on married women.

I dropped out of school at my sixth primary school and my husband continued up to the university. Things never change and he continues to inform me that I know nothing and never consults me whenever making significant decisions that concern the family. I am aware when I take the initiative to talk to him, he talks about me in a low tone and at one point, and our disagreements have led to physical fights. I also believed that his education level was a bit higher, which gave him more power in the marriage, and I was powerless to stop his mistreatment. (A woman 36 yrs)

Another woman stated

My husband is well educated than me and he prefers to bring me down with this. When I volunteer to make suggestions with respect to the family matters, he informs me that this is a lousy talk. The verbal abuse has in the years evolved to physical body abuse. I believe that, with similar education we would be more respectful, understanding and balanced in our marriage and most likely there would be less violence. (A woman 29 yrs)

Report by a man came out thus.

I have master degree and my wife had secondary education. There are instances when I get angry with her because she is unable to understand thoroughly some of the things I say or offer. I admit I should be more tolerant but these moments of anger make me lose temper and the conflicts become violent fights most of the time. I have also been taught that level disparity in education may result in failure in communication and stress in marriage where one of the partners feels that the other partner is not intellectually a match with the other. (A Man 38 yrs.)

Another man opined thus:

My wife has never reached the primary school and I attended college. I tend to feel that she is not listening or comprehending what I am saying concerning future plans and this leads to constant brawl. I have also shouted and even hit her. I know it was not right but there are times when I feel that knowing her better would help us know each other, respond better to each other, and cause less misunderstanding that leads to our creating problems in our house (A Man 45 yrs.)

On the other hand, the associations where the wife is smarter than her husband when it comes to the degree of education can be also attributed to the occurrence of IPV, which can be attributed to the issues of the challenges presented against the traditional gender roles, and the beliefs that the male authority is jeopardized by the problems. These data of IDI demonstrate this.

I am a university graduate but my husband did not go past secondary school. During the time we are in an argument, there are times that he tells me that I am acting like I am smarter and I want to dominate him. He loses his temper when I inform him that I witnessed him commit what I term wrong when in the company of others. The arguments have at times led to pugnacious activities. I believe my education leaves him insecure but I just want us to make more decisions as a team (A woman 37 yrs).

But a Man who is a trader pointed out:

My wife graduated from the university and I only studied vocationally. I like her cleverness and she has an offensive tone of speaking that has rendered me insignificant. It is a blow to my self esteem and I have reacted in the past yelling and even hitting her. I think that our educational differences are a challenge to the approach to my upbringing in understanding the purpose of a man. (A Man 39 yrs.)

Educational Inequality and Inter-life course IPV.

The findings also demonstrate that the relationship between educational gap and IPV is not always the same over the course of life. One such case is that younger couples and those who were at the early stages of marriages may have had conflicts as a result of the dissimilarity in education compared to the older couples who may have learnt to adjust to their differences. The relationship between education and IPV risk may also be influenced by factors of the stage in life such as child bearing period, employment transitions and taking retirement. For example,

The first three years of our marriage had always seen the husband saying to me that he did not achieve the same level in school as I did. It even acted as a competition in the matter of who was more knowledgeable. Sometimes it led to shouting and him snatching back in discussions. We are also young and none of us was educated on how to cope with those differences. I think it is even more stressful at this point as we are now working and raising our first child, and at the same time we are attempting to adjust to married life. (Female, 27 yrs.)

Another respondent stated

My wife is more educated than I am and this would be a source of confusion in our initial marriage. I also felt that she was second-guessing me because she believed that she was more judgmental on those issues because of schooling. I justified myself, and this brought clashes on. We talked about it during the years, but as children became older and the necessity to obtain a stable job arose it has become more challenging. I believe education among partners is not an issue however when one of the partners experiences the shadowing effect then there might be tension particularly when the parties are still trying to establish their course in life. (Male and 31 years old)

Moreover, thus IDI was uncovered.

My husband is also very well educated and when we got married he presupposed that as husband he has the final decision. First it caused numerous conflicts. As time passed by we both settled in our family lives and I became more involved with our business we reduced the conflict. Now we are nearly 20 years and it is not about education anymore but money and

future of our kids. It was the experience and mutual respect, I believe but, the initial few years were hell because of the difference in terms of education. (Female, 39 yrs)

Another male participant also thought as follows:

My wife had never attended secondary school, unlike me who is a degree holder. I have also lied in previous instances under my education to win an argument when we were younger and this has hurt our relationship. Such problems faded when we became adults and grew older especially when the children became adults. Nowadays our disputes revolve more around health and retirement planning not to mention attending to the extended family. I learned that education differences are not critical when you already have a life together. This did, however, cause stress in the initial phase of marriage and there were some incidences, which I am not very proud of. The fourth interviewee (Male, 45 years)

Another lady respondent confirmed this claim by saying that when we were young, the higher education pursued by my husband was a life barrier strategy because I struggled to retain some conversations. Having decades of cumulative life experience, education has become secondary but that does not mean that fewer problems are encountered by younger couple I know to bridge such differences. She said:

My husband received higher education in the preliminary years and this made me feel that I am unable to engage in certain discussions. He would be attending meetings which I could not follow to the entirety and led to distance. Nevertheless, we are at a stage in which after several decades of marriage we share more experiences a couple than we do differences in schools. However, nowadays in the old age, we also face such issues as health costs and the upkeep of the grandchildren. Although education is still pertinent, this is not in the same form as it was before. Younger couples familiar to me also have a harder time because they are yet to learn how to bridge that divide. (Female, 52 years)

One of the male respondents said this.

When I married my wife, she was better educated. I was insecure at that time, was self-conscious, and I needed to seek other ways of proving myself, and am controlling at times. We bickered back and forth. But we have trusted one another over the years. Now we are in our sixties and it is not an issue with education. Our orientation is more towards spending time together and over how our retirement funds are to be managed. Reflectively, I observe that younger couples are even more oiled up by such types of gaps, as they continue to seek ways of establishing their roles, raise children and support their careers which make the situation even tenser. (A Man 42 yrs)

This study revealed that the socio-economic factors in the state of Abia such as the disparities of the rural-urban population, the unemployment level, and the cultural demands play a role in either supporting or undermining the relationship between educational inequity and IPV. The second example would be related to the case of rural area as well as more conservative gender roles as formed, the difference in education levels may be more directly correlated to the situation of the seek to control, words, or even physical assault since more education in the women may be viewed as a threat to the male dominance. Conversely, the same disparities in urban, whereby there is exposure to some sort of egalitarianism, women empowerment, increased access to jobs etc, might not result in as much tension or can be overridden by involving in

improved communication patterns and decision making. All these contextual differences lead to the opinion that the same educational inequality can be used to presuppose various degrees of implication upon the risk of IPV based on the socio-economic and cultural context, which couples live in.

5 Discussion

The study has substantiated the results of other researchers who indicated that education gap between spouses can be of critical role in intimate partner violence (IPV). Following Jewkes et al. (2017) and Vyas and Watts (2009), the current research indicates that the increased level of education of wives compared to that of their spouses can be a threat to the gender norms, therefore, leading to the control behavior of the male counterparts, verbal abuse, or even violent conduct. Conversely, the widened power disparity between the husbands and the wives can lead to the possibility of women not being involved in the decision-making that validates the research by Kaukinen (2004) that the overall inferior educational level may limit the bargaining capacity of the women in their respective marital unions.

The current findings suggest that the impacts of educational gaps are more prevalent in younger couples as previous studies have demonstrated that there was a variation in IPV among the couples based on their life course (Capaldi et al., 2012; Benson and Fox, 2004). The issue of educational differences has been also discovered to intersect with childbearing, job instability, and financial strain stressors during the initial years of marriage, and it strengthens the conflicts. However, with age, as the couples have more associated experiences, these gaps appear to become non-significant as the causes of IPV and older couples imply that the gap becomes adjusted with the high inventory to the problems of health, education of children, and retirement. This is in line with longitudinal observations where the dynamics of relationships vary with the age stage and reduce the direct impact that specific structural inequalities have on the same.

The results also support the moderating role of the socio-economic situation in the determination of the relationship between educational differences and IPV also shown by Okemgbo et al. (2002) and Ajuwon et al. (2011). In the rural areas, in Abia State, where patriarch and strict gender values remain the most significant, the educational disparity, along with the educational benefits of the female gender, has more opportunities to be considered the threat to the male power, contributing to the rising risks of IPV. Compared to this, the city life, where persons are subjected to exceptionally high levels of egalitarian ideals, women and girls empowerment movement, and multiplicity of economic opportunities, can dilute the charged environment caused by educational differences. Nevertheless, the low unemployment rate and the financial complexities in the rural areas and urban centers exacerbate the IPV due to the rise in the financial dependence and the extreme stress levels, according to the findings of the investigation held by Heise and Kotsadam (2015) that strengthens the economic-based levels of pressure, which make the relationships between genders extreme.

Thus, one can assert that the differences in education, the life course patterns, and socio-economic backgrounds are what lead to the complexity of IPV in Abia. These results suggest that the interventions should not be limited to the gender norms and adaptation of the education towards equity but also to age-specific stressors within relationships and the socio-cultural environment in which the couples are living. In addition to the precedents in the studies, the research highlights the importance of the multi-level approaches to a solution that should cover the structural disparities, as well as the dynamic relations that are altered throughout the period of time.

6. Conclusion

As demonstrated in this paper, educational disparity between husbands and wives is a critical determinant that identifies nature of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Abia State; the direction that the gap takes whether positive or negative determines the level of power, style of communications and conflict resolutions. The findings indicate that the effect of educational difference is not in all life stages since with such a difference, younger couples become tenser particularly at the stage of life where children, job insecurities, and economic strains exist and older couples improve as they age. The social economic conditions also moderate this relationship and this is whereby a village has closer ties between the level of education and IPV because the values and norms of patriarchy are deeply entrenched and in the urban environment where equality and bargaining have more opportunities. Nonetheless, unemployment and financial problems are still high rates that cut across risk factors to grow IPV regardless of the setting.

7. Recommendations

The recommendations were as follows:

1. Present measures to maintain constant learning opportunities of both men and women particularly in the rural location to reduce the gap in attainment and increasing rapport in the relations.
2. Prevention and counselling programs are customized by individual couples, based on their age or life phase e.g. skills of interpersonal communication and conflict resolution by younger couples, health and financial planning by older couples.
3. Raise community, religious and local leaders to oppose the patriarchal regulations of education that explain women education as a danger to male domination, particularly in rural settings.
4. Enhance access to livelihood, employment, and microcredit financing to reduce financial priorities because it is coupled with educational disparity that puts the victims at a higher risk of IPV.
5. Egalitarian relationships and their enlightenment concerning the value of mutual decision making in marriages regardless of the level of education should be propagated through media, schooling, and discussions within the community.
6. Train health workers, social welfare workers, and community-based organization workers to identify the instances of IPV where educational inequalities exist as a causal factor and make the right referrals and support services to them.

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