



# **Religiosity and Attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence among Married Persons in Lagos, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Several studies have indicated that attitudes toward Intimate Partner Violence and factors influencing them are prominent predictors of IPV. This study investigated the attitude of married persons towards Intimate Partner Violence in relation to their level of religiosity, age, religious affiliation, and gender, in a sample of Lagos State residents. It was hypothesized that there will be a negative relationship between level of religiosity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence and also that age, type of religious affiliation and gender will influence attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence. Two instruments were deployed for data collection: - The Religious Trust Scale (RTS) that measures the level of an individual's trust in his/her religion and the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (IPVAS) that measures peoples' propensity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. After the data were collected, analysis of the results using Pearson Product Moment correlation and Independent T- test showed that there was a significant but negative relationship between level of religiosity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. Also, it was found that there were significant differences between young and middle-aged adults, gender and type of religious affiliation of the participants in their attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made, one of which is that people's level of religiosity is instrumental in determining their way of life, thus religion can be used as a tool or weapon to prevent or reduce incidences of IPV.

**Keywords:** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV); domestic violence, religiosity; attitude, affiliation.

## **Introduction**

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is defined as abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship. "Intimate partner" refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners. According to United Nations (2012), between 15% and 76% women have been targeted for physical and/or sexual violence in their life-time worldwide, making violence against women become a serious social problem. The most common type of violence against women is violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner, including physical, verbal,

economic, or sexual violence. These may include but is not limited to slapping, hitting, kicking, beating, biting, stalking, forced sexual intercourse, sexual coercion, insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation, threats, isolation and restricting access to things including denial of privileges, etc. Thus, IPV can happen very often and the severity ranges from one episode of violence that could have a lasting impact to chronic and severe episodes over a number of years (WHO, 2010). Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against

women's rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets (Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi, 2009). In addition to the immediate impact, IPV is a significant public health problem and has lifelong consequences and beyond injury and death, victims of IPV are more likely to report a range of negative mental and physical health outcomes that are both acute and chronic in nature (Black, 2011). Other possible impacts may include decline in relationship satisfaction, relationship breakdowns, and divorce, with accompanying negative effects such as loss of income and housing; personal distress including fear, depressive symptoms and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and consequences such as substance use. According to Tjaden & Thoennes (2000), approximately 1.5 million women and 834,700 men are raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year, and among these women, one in three gets injured. Furthermore, physical aggression that does not result in injuries severe enough to require medical attention can have other impacts that are destructive to the relationship and to the wellbeing of the partners (Bradbury & Lawrence 1999).

IPV is prevalent in almost all cultures and occurs across all social classes, religions and the chunk of the burden is borne by the women in the relationships. According to Gracia, (2004), IPV is one of the most unreported forms of violence in the society. According to Okengbo, Omideyi & Odimegwu, (2002), Intimate Partner Violence Against Women (IPVAW) is deep-rooted in many African societies, where it is considered a prerogative of men and a purely domestic matter in the society. Although there are a lot of literature reflecting Intimate Partner Violence more in the developed world some studies have been carried out in Nigeria for instance, Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, (2005) investigated the perception women have regarding wife-beating. The data was retrieved from the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of which 9810 women between the ages of 10-49 and 3082 men between the ages of 16-64 were interviewed. The approval of the respondents' varied based on their personal

attributes and they found that ethnic affiliation, level of education, socio-economic status, and place of residence are factors that influence their concordance with wife beating. They found that about 66.4% and 50.4% of ever married and unmarried women respectively in their study expressed consent for wife beating. In another study carried out in Sabo area of Ibadan majorly occupied by predominantly Muslim Hausa tribe by Owoaje and Olaolorun (2006), to determine the attitude of women between the ages of 18-49 towards Intimate partner violence. They were interviewed using a structured questionnaire administered in their local language but translated back to English before it was analyzed in order to retain its real meaning. It was found that 79.5% of the women believed that it was justifiable for men to beat their wives. Okenwa, Lawoko, and Janson (2009), found a one -year prevalence of IPVAW to be 29%, psychological abuse was 23%, physical abuse was 23% and sexual abuse was 8% among women of reproductive age in Lagos. Another cross-sectional study by Uwana, Fawole and Adeoye (2014), to determine the prevalence of IPVAW in Ibadan, found a life time prevalence of 42.3%, while the lifetime experience of physical, psychological and sexual Intimate Partner Violence was 7.9%, 41.8% and 6.6% respectively.

Intimate Partner Violence is a sensitive topic in Nigerian communities where there is a strong cultural emphasis on "saving face". A troublesome aspect of IPVAW is in the benign social and cultural acceptance of the physical chastisement of women as being the husband's right to "correct" an erring wife. One factor associated with IPV is the issue of age, for which some research has found that younger couples are more likely to be victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence than older couples (Adejimi, Fawole, Kyriacou, & Sekoni, 2015) while some other research found that older couples experience Intimate partner violence more than younger couples (Broom, Nayar, Doron, Nilan; 2012). However, most research findings suggest that the incidence of IPV decreases with age, with younger samples reporting higher levels of IPV (Thompson; Bonomi; Anderson; Reid; Dimer; Carrell &

Rivara, 2006). In a longitudinal study, Capaldi & Kim (2009) examined the frequency of aggression at three points in young adulthood for men at ages 20-23, 23-25 and 25-27 and found evidence indicating that physical aggression declines over time with couples probably due to the fact that couple tend to understand each other better as they continue to stay together.

Generally speaking, our belief systems and religions reflect our moral judgement about what is right or wrong, which eventually serves to justify our actions. The process of searching for spiritual guidance and support reveals various circumstances that are exclusive to religious scenarios and are worthy of further exploration. Sometimes, women use their religious beliefs as reasons why they cannot leave an abusive relationship, which explains why religion and culture play a huge role in the decision to stay in abusive relationships (Hayes, 2013). Data from both Christian and secular studies suggest that on any given Sunday, a substantial percentage of women sitting in the church might be victims of Intimate Partner Violence (Williams & Jenkins, 2019). When people enter into intimate relationships within Christian context, they usually subscribe to religious tenets and beliefs centering around the class of heterosexual relation such as child bearing, child rearing and obedience to authority (Bayer & Levitt, 2003). Research done in some Islamic countries found that women are more likely to justify acts of violence against women than men. (Douki, et al, 2003). Some studies show that more religious couples have lower levels of IPV in that people who practice Christianity are more committed to their marriages and are less likely to exhibit aggressive behavior towards their significant other. A review of 139 studies conducted between 1978 and 1989 found a positive relationship between religiosity and good mental health, lower levels of anxiety, increased self-esteem, and generally lower levels of psychological disorders. (Pourganash, Hadi, & Somaye, 2009).

The theoretical underpinning for this study is social learning theory which reveals a lot about the foundation of IPV. Studies have revealed the emergence of intergenerational transmission of violence presupposing that IPV is passed on from

one generation to another, suggesting that the effects of IPV ends up as a learnt behaviour in an individual. In trying to understand and apprehend intergenerational transmission, it was discovered that witnessing marital violence and having experienced harsh and poor treatment in a family, affects an individual's future relationships (Akers & Jennings, 2009). The feminist theories on the other hand, view the foundation of Intimate Partner Violence against women as the product of living in a society that tolerates aggressive behaviours enacted by men, while socializing women to be non-violent. The advocates of this theory acknowledge that women can also behave violently in their relationships with men though the problem of women abusing men is not seen as a grave social problem and so does not merit equal amount of attention or support as violence against women. The Society in transition model sees domestic violence as emerging from the fact that African societies are in transition from traditional cultures to an urbanized modern society (Bowman, 2003) where women are economically empowered and below the surface, many of the violent quarrels that occur is as a result of social change and men's sense of threat in the face of it because of consequential difficulty of women to perform their traditional gender assigned chores because of work outside the home.

From the discussion so far, it is only logical to assume that the figures and prevalence rates of Intimate Partner Violence have increased as a result of evolution of society as well as increase in population. Whereas not many researches have been carried out in developing countries like Nigeria, the present study thus seeks to explore the extent to which level of religiosity will determine or influence negative or positive attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence. The study will also compare the attitudes of young and middle-aged adults towards Intimate Partner Violence and also gender differences in attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.

### *Hypotheses*

1. There will be a significant negative relationship between level of religiosity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.

2. Young adults will report significantly negative attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence than middle aged adults.
3. There will be a significant difference between the two religious affiliations in attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.
4. Females will differ significantly from males in their attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.

## **Method**

### *Participants and Procedure*

The research was carried out in environments that have mosques and churches. The participants studied were married people who reside in Lagos Metropolis within three Local Government Areas who had been identified as married and their consent obtained. Copies of the questionnaires were distributed to worshippers in churches and mosques (the two major religions in Nigeria). The sample consisted of 230 married persons purposively selected from various churches and mosques, made up of 110 (47.8%) males and 120 (52.2%) females. They were aged between 20 and 60 years with a mean age of 38.5 with 133 (57.8%) being young adults and 97 being middle-aged adults accounting for 42.2% of the sample. In addition, 157 or (68.9%) of the respondents were Christians, while 73 or (31.7%) of them were Muslims. Before the questionnaires were administered, the participants who had been informed that taking part in the research process was optional with no obligations and they could withdraw or leave at any point if they didn't want to be a part of it anymore. They were also assured of utmost confidentiality of all personal information. At each location, the copies of the questionnaires were administered to the participants after the prayer services and or after societal meetings. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design since no variable was actively manipulated in order to establish a relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

### *Instruments*

The Religious Trust Scale (RTS): This is a 26-item scale developed by Ayenibiowo & Ayeni (2009), to measure the level of an individual's

trust on his/her religion. It yields scores on a 5-point Likert scale response format ranging from 1 (rarely or none of the time) to 5 (most or all of the time). They reported a Cronbach alpha, split-half and odd-even reliability coefficients of .74 and .71 respectively. The scoring of this instrument was done by adding together the numbers representing each participant's scores on all the items and the total sum divided by 3 to get each participant's score. Participants with RTS scores above the mean are rated as having high trust in religion while those with scores below the mean are considered as having low trust in their religion; thus, having low level of religiosity.

Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (IPVAS): This is a 22- item scale used to measure the propensity and attitude of people towards intimate partner violence. The scale was designed by Smith, Thompson, Tomaka & Buchanan (2005) and it contains three sub-factors which includes Abuse (containing 8 items), Violence (containing 4 items) and Control (containing 7 items). The scale is arranged on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items 1, 4, 14, 22, 6, 13, 11 and 10 were reverse coded. Scores from 55 and above are regarded as depicting a negative attitude towards intimate violence and low scores represented positive attitude towards IPV. The scale has high and acceptable internal consistency reliability with Cronbach alphas of .81, .69, and .70 for the Abuse, Control and Physical violence subscales respectively. Another study by Fincham, Cui Braithwaite & Pasley (2008), that used the scale showed internal consistency reliability that ranged from .68 to .91.

### *Data Analysis*

The data obtained were analyzed by coding the data into the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 20, using the descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics- Pearson Product Moment correlation to determine the relationship between the variables, and independent T-test.

## Results

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics: showing the Mean and Standard Deviation of intimate partner violence and religiosity by sex, age and religious affiliation. This a summary of the initial analysis of data on all variables studied.*

		IPV		Religiosity	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Sex</b>	Male	57.03	10.21	120.57	17.88
	Female	61.07	15.51	127.96	3.93
<b>Age</b>	Younger	61.85	16.80	125.75	6.14
	Middle aged	55.40	3.71	121.83	19.64
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Christianity	61.26	15.56	121.82	16.02
	Islam	54.54	3.52	129.01	1.82

The result in Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence and religiosity by age. The respondents who were young adults reported higher mean scores (M= 61.85; SD= 16.80) than the middle-aged adults (M= 55.40; SD= 3.71).

Also, female respondents reported higher mean scores on attitudes towards IPV, (M= 61.07; SD= 15.51) than their male counterparts (M= 57.03; SD= 10.21). On religiosity, female respondents recorded higher mean scores (M= 127.96; SD= 3.93) than their male counterparts (120.57; SD= 17.88). The table also shows that on level of religiosity, young adults recorded higher mean

scores (M= 125.75; SD= 6.14) than the middle-aged adults (121.83; SD=19.64). Finally, the table shows the mean and standard deviation by the respondents' religious affiliation with Christians recording higher mean scores (M= 61.26; SD= 15.56), than Muslims (M= 54.54; SD= 3.52) on attitude towards intimate partner violence. On level of religiosity, Muslims recorded higher mean scores (M= 129.01; SD= 1.82) than Christians (121.82; SD= 16.02).

### *Tests of Hypotheses*

**Hypothesis 1:** *There will be a significant negative relationship between level of religiosity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.*

**Table 2: Pearson product-moment Correlation Statistics between religiosity and attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence**

	Mean	SD	R	R
Religiosity	124.10	13.68	1	
IPVAS	59.13	13.36	-0.293*	1

\*p <0.05

The result in Table 2 shows an “r” value of -0.293\* (at p<0.05) meaning that there is a significant negative relationship between the variables under investigation. This indicates that

as level of religiosity increases (higher score on religiosity scale), attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence decreases and as level religiosity decreases (lower score on religiosity

scale), attitude towards intimate partner violence increases.

Thus, the hypothesis one which states that will be a significant relationship between level of

religiosity and attitude towards intimate partner violence is hereby accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Young adults will report significantly higher attitude towards intimate partner violence than middle aged adults.*

**Table 3: Independent t-test comparison of attitude toward Intimate Partner Violence by Age**

	Age	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	P<0.05
IPVAS	Young adult	133	61.85	16.80	3.716*	228	0.01
	Middle aged	97	55.40	3.71			

\* p<0.05

Result in Table 3 shows a significant difference between young adult and older adults on attitude towards intimate partner violence. The young adults had higher mean scores which differed significantly in their attitude towards intimate partner violence from middle-aged adults. The t-test comparison yielded a positive t-value of 3.716 at p<0.05. This implies that there is a

significant age difference in terms of attitude towards intimate partner violence among the younger adult and older adults married couples sampled. Thus, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

**Hypothesis 3:** *There will be a significant difference between the two religion affiliations in attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.*

**Table 4: Independent t-test comparison of attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence by religious affiliation**

	Religious affiliation	N	Mean	SD	T	df	P<0.05
IPV	Christian	133	61.26	15.56	3.642*	228	0.01
	Muslim	97	54.54	3.52			

\* p<0.05

Result in Table 4 shows a significant difference between Christians and Muslims on attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. The t-test comparison yielded a positive t-value of 3.64 at p<0.05. This implies that there is a religious affiliation difference in terms of attitude towards intimate partner violence among the Christians and

Muslims sampled with Christians having higher mean scores. Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

**Hypothesis 4:** *There will be significant sex differences in attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence.*

**Table 5: Independent t-test comparison of intimate partner violence by gender**

	Sex	N	Mean	SD	T	df	P<0.05
Intimate Partner Violence	Male	110	57.02	10.20	-2.311*	228	0.02
	Female	120	61.07	15.51			

p<0.05

Result in Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between male and female on attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. The t-test comparison yielded a negative t-value of -2.311 at  $p < 0.05$ . This implies that there is a significant difference between the sexes in terms of attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. However, despite both males and females have a negative attitude towards Intimate partner violence, the females showed a more negative attitude than males. Thus, hypothesis 4 is accepted.

### Discussion

The findings of the study are in line with the major objective which was to determine the relationship between religiosity and attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence among married persons. The findings showed that there was an inverse relationship which means that as the level of religiosity increases, the attitude and propensity towards Intimate Partner Violence decreases and vice versa. This inverse relationship is in consonance with Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson & Johnson (2007) that religious involvement is correlated with reduced levels of domestic violence as religious involvement, specifically church attendance, protects against domestic violence. Other findings in agreement with this notion is that a positive relationship exists between religiosity and good mental health, lower levels of anxiety, increased self-esteem and low levels of psychological disorders. If attitudes are really underlying structures of real behaviour, then understanding the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence might help us understand the relationship between the occurrence, the causes, and the maintenance of Intimate Partner Violence (Dent & Arias, 1990) and may as well lead to its prevention. Some researchers opine that people who approve of Intimate Partner Violence will likely employ violence against their partners and could possibly be victims themselves which then leads to a vicious cycle of violence (Riggs & O'Leary, 1996), but some others think of it as an indirect relationship. Thus, encouraging and upholding high levels of religiosity in people can influence people's

attitudes towards Intimate partner and violence in general thereby leading to a reduction or outright prevention of IPV. Taken together, these findings indicate that being religious aids in the reduction and avoidance of acts of intimate partner violence. On the contrary, Koch and Ramirez (2010), argued that there is no relationship between religiosity and intimate partner violence which may be attributable to cultural and or other methodological issues.

Age differences were found to be significant in attitude towards intimate partner violence between young and middle-aged adults. Young adults showed a more negative attitude towards intimate partner violence than middle aged adults even though they both showed a negative attitude. This finding is in agreement with Fawole, Aderonmu and Fawole (2005) who found that younger respondents had a significantly more negative attitude than older adults towards IPV. Our finding also is in agreement with the work of Owoaje and Olaolorun (2006). This finding seems to be in contrast to the widely held notion from results of previous researches (e.g. Adejimi, et al. 2014) that IPV was more prevalent among younger couples than older ones. The present result however, is about the propensity to Intimate Partner Violence than the act of violence itself which is reality implying that there may be other factors mitigating IPV other than the attitudes or beliefs held by an individual. Again, the present study was looking at attitude and propensity towards intimate partner violence and not the act of violence itself so future researches should focus on teasing out these mitigating factors by adopting different strategies.

This study also shows that there is a difference in religious affiliation in relation to attitude towards intimate partner violence and this difference is significant. The findings indicate that both Muslims and Christians have a negative attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence. However, the attitude of Christians was significantly more negative towards intimate partner violence than that of Muslims. This result can be as a result of the widely differing tenets of both religions and their practices. They may both find their similarity in the belief and worship of one God but the regulations of their day to day lives

especially in the area of marriage are completely different, for example, whereas Muslims subscribe to the practice of polygamy, the Christians abhor it and consider it abominable enough to be a basis for suspending a member who practices such from coming to church. In fact, in some Arab and Islamic countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, and Israel, women were indifferent about Intimate Partner Violence, not only because it is believed to be a private matter, but is frequently justified based on analysis of selected excerpts from the Koran which are adapted to prove that men who violate their wives are following the commandments of Allah (God) (Galloway, 2014). These strongly held beliefs can trickle down into how intimate partners treat themselves though this does not absolve Christian couples from misunderstandings that may lead to physical aggression and violence

Furthermore, significant sex differences in attitude towards intimate partner violence were found. Although both males and females showed a negative attitude towards intimate partner violence, females were found to indicate more negative attitude than males. This means that females showed an attitude of lack of tolerance for intimate partner violence more than men which is in agreement the findings of Okenwa-Emegwa, Lawoko & Jansson. (2016). On the other hand, some studies have found the contrary to be the case (e.g. Tran, Nguyen & Fisher, 2016) such that women showed an attitude of tolerance towards intimate partner. The writers explained such attitudes to be so as a result of internalization. Others believe that women were more likely to justify acts of intimate partner violence than men, thereby leaning towards a positive attitude towards intimate partner violence. These inconsistencies may be attributable to a number of reasons such as the sample size, age of respondents, culture and the fact that attitudes about IPV perpetrated against women are multifactorially determined. This present result is as expected, considering that women constitute the vulnerable group and, in most relationships, where there is violence, they are usually the victims because they are believed to be the weaker sex.

### *Conclusions and Implications of the Study*

This study has implications for individuals, families, schools, religious bodies and work settings, amongst others in the Nigerian culture because people's attitudes shape their behaviour. The findings of this study have provided additional information as to why intimate partner violence persists and may be on the increase despite advocacies to the contrary. The fact that religiosity is instrumental in determining people's way of life to an extent helping them to differentiate what is wrong from what is right and thus religion can be used as a tool or weapon to prevent or discourage IPV. Furthermore, identifying religious affiliations that tolerate IPV has a part to play in helping to reduce the rates of Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria as religious leaders can be trained to become advocates against such attitudes. The contents of the lessons learnt in these religious institutions should be checked for elements of characteristics that may aid acts of intimate partner violence in Nigeria and the world in general.

### *Limitations and Recommendations*

There are limitations in this study, as usual with this type of research topic which is very sensitive and participants may not express their true views openly, as they think that their responses may damage both their reputation and that of their families. Sometimes in this type of research, participants may also report the behaviour that is believed to be consistent with their culture, rather than the actual circumstances. Obviously, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits the extent to which we can draw conclusions regarding temporality or the causal nature of observed associations. Also, as the sample size is limited, the generalization of result is also limited. From the research findings, there are primary reduction systems used to change public attitude and so violence prevention campaigns could be conducted through some religious organizations. Agents of socialization such as families, schools and the media can lend their voices and say "no" to Intimate Partner Violence. Also, cultural practices that encourage acts of intimate partner violence should be discouraged. As the bulk of this research was able to identify that there are differences in the attitudes of



people towards intimate partner violence, it will be beneficial for future research to investigate if there are differences in the attitude of people towards major and minor forms of psychological violence other than physical violence.

It is recommended that future research can also investigate the interaction of the various variables explored in this study to understand if and how the variables of age, level of religiosity and religious affiliation can change over time and how these changes influence attitudes towards Intimate Partner Violence. Other demographic variables such as level of education, ethnicity and socioeconomic status could also be considered and comparison of samples expanded across states in the future.

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