

**FEMALE-PERPETRATED DOMESTIC ABUSE ON MEN: A STUDY OF EBUKA  
ONUMA'S ENEMY OF PROGRESS**

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**Abstract**

*This study explored the experiences of male victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse otherwise referred to as "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV) in Nigeria. Few studies exist about the experiences of men who are victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse as it has for a long time been covertly discussed and there are not many studies about these men's experiences in seeking and receiving psychological help. Richard J. Gelles's Social Control Theory guided this study to understand victimology and perceptions of gender roles. With review of related scholarly views tilted towards understanding the causes of domestic abuse, gender and domestic abuse and also, the types and forms of domestic abuse. Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative approach, journals and books. The study, therefore, recommends amongst others, that Government should enact laws that will make it mandatory for schools, religious organizations, employers of labour and other social organizations to march words with action in fighting the menace of domestic abuse against men in Nigeria. Further effort should be geared towards early detection of domestic abuse and adequately address the same and determine where continuous monitoring and evaluation may be necessary also, victim-centered services, patient-centered approaches, and treatment and support for survivors of domestic abuse will help to improve awareness about male victims in society while offering insight to decrease negative stigma.*

**Keyword:** Domestic, Female, Abuse

## **Introduction**

Domestic abuse, also called “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence”, can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith or class.

Victims of domestic abuse may also include a child or other relative, or any other household member.

Domestic abuse is typically manifested as a pattern of abusive behavior toward an intimate partner in a dating or family relationship, where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim.

However, domestic abuse can be mental, physical, economic or sexual. Incidents are rarely isolated and usually escalate in frequency and severity. Domestic abuse may culminate in serious physical injury or death.

Domestic abuse is not an illusory, but a significant public health problem, with substantial occurrences of instances across all demographics including gender, age, race, as well as sexual orientation. Domestic abuse is no doubt a reoccurring theme in many lives, especially families around the country. It can be argued that one in five men encounter domestic abuse in their environment and also in their respective intimate relationships.

Sometimes, it can be straining to deviate from the typical scenario that involves a female being the victim of domestic abuse and a male being the perpetrator, and it can be difficult also, to differentiate between the offender and victim in domestic abuse when the roles are reversed. Males may be unfairly judged in situations of domestic abuse as the ones who were the aggressors all along, because of the typical stereotype ascribed to men by the society as an aggressor as opposed to a victim.

Society has created an ideal criteria of what a victim is and if it is a man, this may make people in the society/community, as well as the victim uncomfortable

because it is different from the stereotyped situation for domestic abuse. Another aspect to consider when men report incidents of domestic abuse with female perpetrators is how the process will work in the criminal justice system if they were to press charges, obtain an order of protection or go and testify as a witness to hold the perpetrator in custody.

According to Hoff: "Males are equally as likely as females to be victims of IPV, psychological aggression, and pathological control over sexual health" (156).

Male victims, however, are most times not eager or willing to report or seek help due to the recurring stigma placed on male victims of domestic abuse in society.

Research has shown that male victimization is a reoccurring and in today's world, a common crime with little contributing research to comprehension of lived experiences and help-seeking after their encounters. Be it social stigma, hopelessness, embarrassment, or feelings of fear, male victims of domestic abuse are less likely to report situations when they have been victimized. Hoff asserts that "Even if a male victim reports the crime, researches have shown that they have been unfairly judged due to males being the predominant aggressor in domestic violence incidents (159).

When seeking services, among the barriers that have been identified through research is that males do not need services provided for victims of domestic abuse. Thus Driber et al assert that “Males seeking services are not consistent with their gender role in society (175).

In a study carried out by Enyon in Hawaii (2015). There was evidence of the lack of emergency services for male victims of domestic abuse, and the long-term effects of psychological support and services. Enyon further found that many emergency rooms had a high number of male victims needing medical attention due to being attacked by their female partners.

In the society at large, it is evident that there are not enough community support services specifically designed for male victims of domestic abuse and this further means that male victims are less likely to learn about coping mechanisms to help them scale through a traumatic experience such as domestic abuse.

However, one other issue that arises with male victims of domestic violence is the unarguable fact that many practitioners are not trained to accept a referral with the male gender victim due to a lack of skill set or knowledge. Unlike the female victim who are referred to their primary care physicians. Meanwhile, recent studies have shown an increase in the clinician’s preparedness to work

with male individuals following victimization and ultimately increased their confidence in working with this population after they had been trained on how to work with male victims of domestic abuse. To this effect, some hospitals in Canada have sexual assault programmes specifically designed to treat victims. According to Du Mont, Macdonald, White, & Turner in a study conducted in Ontario, many male victims disclosed several vulnerabilities that made them fearful of reporting their victimization, including being unemployed, on disability, being homeless, or working in the sex trade (2677).

This applies specifically to men because sexual assault programs are predominantly for female victims, so it makes it harder for male victims to seek help that they do not necessarily know is available. The study will examine the Nollywood film narrative *Enemy of Progress* to ascertain the nature and manifestations of domestic abuse in Nigerian homes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social control theory was developed by Richard J. Gelles (1983) on the basic propositions of an exchange theory of aggression. The exchange/social control

model of family violence proposes that abuse is governed by the principle of costs and rewards. Drawing from exchange theory, Gelles (1983) notes that violence and abuse are used when the rewards are higher than the costs. Drawing from social control theories of delinquency, he proposes that the private nature of the family, the reluctance of social institutions and agencies to intervene, and the low risk of other interventions reduce the costs of abuse and violence. The cultural approval of violence as both expressive and instrumental behavior raises the potential rewards for violence.

Exchange/social control theory is based on the concept that many family conflicts are as a result of an individual's need to obtain and maintain power and control within a relationship. The motivation underlying the abuser's behavior is the power and control that she or he can exert over other members of the family. The more powerful members of families (e.g., fathers, parents, husbands, wives) often use the threat or use of force to obtain compliance from the less powerful family member. Threats, force, and violent behaviors are intended to prohibit the less powerful members of the family from engaging in behavior that the controlling individual does not want while establishing a demand for the abuser's "desirable" behaviors to occur. In addition, the abuser may feel the need to gain control over how other family members think and feel. Abusers, to

maintain control over other members of the family, may use many forms of intimidation, such as coercion, isolation, economic abuse, and denial. The victims typically learn how to respond to the various forms of intimidation, although the struggle to challenge the abuse/abuser may become too overwhelming or dangerous for the victim. As a result, the victim may begin to modify his/her behavior, slowly giving up control to survive and avoid continued abuse.

Furthermore, in seeking to explicate why some family members are violent, exchange/social control theory also explains why other people are not violent. Whereas some individuals are desperate to obtain power, others are controlled by the fear of punishment, as well as their bonds with other people.

### **Gender and Domestic violence**

In relation to the debate on domestic violence, the role of gender is a contentious subject. Around three-quarters of those slain by an intimate partner are women, and roughly one-fourth are men: 1,218 women and 424 men died in the USA in 1999. Regardless of who instigated the violence or the partner's gender, by an intimate partner (Brinkerhoff, Lynn, Ortega & Weitz 2008). In the USA in 2005, intimate partners killed 1181 females and 329 males (Compton, 2010). If they



want to kill their spouse, women are also considerably more likely than males to recruit help; however, multiple-offender homicides of this nature are not included in statistics on domestic violence (Walby & Allen 2004).

Violence against women is a consequence of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have resulted in dominance and discrimination, according to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993). Violence against women is one of the main social mechanisms that keep women in a subordinate position to men, preventing them from fully advancing. Violence against women also prevents women from reaching their full potential (UNFPA 2010 & Dutton & Nicholls 2005).

Bazza, Hadiza (2009) view Section 55 of the Criminal Code, which regulates Nigeria's northern states, as barbarous and cruel since it permits husbands to "correct" their wives using physical punishment, provided the lady is not gravely wounded. Because of what the Criminal Code says: "Nothing is an offence which does not amount to inflicting grave damage upon any person and which is done by...(d) a husband for the purpose of reprimanding his wife, such husband and wife being subject to any general rule or custom on which such reprimand is recognized," as legal.

According to Rebecca (2011), abuse committed against males by their intimate partners or families qualifies as domestic violence in our society against both men and women. Males are rarely identified as domestic abuse victims. The male gender's dominant position in human civilization gives the impression that people are protected from harm inside of their own homes. Particularly recently, when it has been demonstrated that both men and women may be violent. Unfortunate, there is so little information about men who are abused by their female domestic partners compared to women globally. Domestic violence against men is a real issue. In fact, "battered males" is a social issue that has to be addressed. According to popular belief, compared to males who live with women, guys who have another male as a sexual partner are more prone to violence. But, it is also a historical reality of human civilization that women have abused males.

According to Amnesty International (AI), some Nigerian states have passed laws against discrimination and violence against women; however, the study did not name any of these states (248). More details regarding these provisions state legislation and information about how they are implemented but could not be discovered in the sources the Research Directorate investigated for this answer due to time constraints.

28 percent of the 21,468 women polled in Nigeria's Demographic and Health Survey 2008 (NDHS) who were asked about domestic abuse said they had ever encountered physical violence since the age of 15; 15 percent had suffered violence in the preceding year, at least thirteen months (262). However, the NDHS report also notes that it can be difficult to get data on domestic abuse since many women could be ashamed or afraid to talk about their experiences.

Similar to women's abuse, the phenomenon of men being abused is widespread around the world. According to studies, 3.2 million men and 5.3 million women annually experience mild insistent abuse such as pushing, shoving, slapping, grasping, and striking ( CEDAW, 2009). Unexpectedly, the Indian women's rights movement has spawned a movement for men's rights. In the present world, the species of abused men lacks any form of defense, unlike their empowered spouses. Every domestic dispute is made to appear like a terrible act, and every marital disagreement is converted into legalese, endangering the entire foundation of the institution of marriage. In the world's major cities, the number of single-parent families is rising, and fathers are fast going extinct as a species. Is this a response to the outdated patriarchal society that has ruled exclusively in men's favor? Although statistics have indicated that domestic violence affects both men and women, nothing is known regarding the precise

number of males who are involved in relationships with women in which they are abused or treated violently. About 40 instances of domestic abuse against men occur out of 100 total occurrences. In the United States, an estimated 400,000 women are assaulted or subjected to violent treatment each year by their spouse or close companion. This implies that between 300,000 and 400,000 males experience aggressive treatment from their wives or female companions.

### **Why Men Do Not Report any Form of Domestic Abuse against Them by the Female Gender**

Much is not known about domestic abuse and abuse against men for a variety of reasons. Many guys won't even try to report the incident because they find it unfathomable that males may be the victims of domestic violence and abuse. To begin with, men appear to experience domestic abuse at such a low rate that accurate statistics are difficult to come by. In addition, encouraging women to report domestic abuse has required years of lobbying and support. Whereas there hasn't been much done to encourage men to report abuse. Men and women behave differently when it comes to abuse. The causes, goals, and motivations of the sexes frequently diverge greatly. While domestic abuse and violence against women have received attention from the counseling and psychological communities, domestic abuse and violence against men have received much less

attention and funding. The bodily violence that men inflict is significantly larger than the physical harm that women actually inflict on men. When men are abused, the effects of domestic violence are less obvious and less likely to be noticed by others. For instance, it is presumed that a male with a black eye or bruise was involved in a fight with another man or was hurt while playing sports. Even when males do disclose domestic violence and abuse, because most people are shocked, they often feel that no one believes them.

With the media flurry surrounding Chris Henry of the Bengals and Tiger Woods, a crucial element of both tales fell between the cracks: Woods and Henry, like countless other men, were purportedly the targets of domestic abuse committed by their spouses or girlfriends. Domestic violence against men has a harsh economic cost at the individual, societal, and governmental levels in addition to its horrific physical and psychological implications. Domestic violence is typically viewed as a crime committed by men against women by the media, the government, and the general public. As a result, money to address the issue has been largely allocated to initiatives that support women.

Men are just as likely as women to experience domestic abuse, according to more than 200 survey-based research. In reality, the overwhelming body of research shows that an exchange of blows and physical contact occurs in half of all

domestic violence instances. Equal shares of men and women who are abused by their partners make up the remaining 50%.

The idea that battered men are weak or unmanly is one of the reasons that this issue is so widely disregarded. This can be shown in the Barry Williams case, for instance: The former Brady Bunch star recently requested a restraining order against his live-in partner after she assaulted him. She attempted to kick and knife him, took \$29,000 from his bank account, and frequently threatened to kill him. It is difficult to imagine a media outlet making fun of a battered woman, but online media used the occasion to ridicule Williams by drawing comparisons between the incident and various Brady Bunch episodes. Similar criticism was leveled at Saturday Night Live when it aired a skit showing a terrified Tiger Woods being beaten mercilessly by his wife. The event received harsh criticism for being inconsiderate to musical guest Rihanna, who is a survivor of domestic abuse.

According to Bazza, Hadiza (2009), Nigeria does not have any national laws that particularly address violence against women. Bazza also noted Nigeria's 1985 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, international treaties can only be put into effect if a corresponding domestic law has been passed by Parliament, according

to Section 12 of the Nigerian Constitution (Nigeria 1999, Subsection 12 (1)).

Although such domestic legislation was created in 2005, it has not yet been passed into law as of February 2010.

There is a common belief that men are always the abusers and women are always the victims. Between 50 and 60 percent of all domestic violence and abuse is directed at women. There are numerous explanations for why people believe males never become victims and women frequently overlook the possibility. For one thing, domestic violence and abuse against Men have long been downplayed, excused, and disregarded. When it comes to the epidemic of domestic violence and violence against women, women are now better organized, more supportive, and more vocal. Domestic abuse and violence against men have received very little attention, especially since violence against men is so blatant and has long been disregarded. Although more women are being found guilty of domestic abuse, discovering the number of male victims is a complex affair (Guardian Tuesday 7 June 2011).

There are no quick guidelines for comprehending emotional distinctions between males and females. Principles and dynamics exist that permit interpretation of unique circumstances and there are certain similarities between domestic abuse against women and men. Differences and similarities. Domestic abuse, whether

committed by men or women, includes pushing, striking the other person or slamming, slapping, punching, throwing things, forcing or slamming a door either with anything or a weapon. Domestic abuse can also take the form of emotional or psychological abuse. What will harm a man psychologically and emotionally can vary in specific circumstances. Avoid things that damage women. Being labelled a coward, impotent, or failure can be demoralizing for some men and has a very different psychological effect on men than on women. Cruel words hurt, however, they have varying degrees of pain and lingering effects. Most of the time emotional abuse has a deeper impact on men than physical assault. For instance, a man may feel more confident in himself and let other men know that he can survive if he can tolerate and "brush off" a physical assault by women in front of other men up to the prohibition against hitting women. Men tend to be extremely sensitive to emotional and psychological abuse in general. In some situations, emotional abuse against a man in front of other males can be much more damaging than physical assault. According to some professionals, women are frequently more "brutal" than men when it comes to mental and emotional abuse.

In the United Kingdom, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in its "Domestic Violence Policy" uses the term "domestic violence" to



refer to a variety of aggressive and abusive actions, defining it as: “The abuse of authority and control over another individual who is or has been involved in a close relationship”. It can happen in same-gender partnerships as well as those between people of other genders, and it has a significant impact on children’s lives as well as that of individuals, families, and communities. The most violent representation of inequality is abuse, which can be either physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological. Intimidation, harassment, property damage, threats, and financial abuse. Differentiation is not dependent on single instances, but rather on trends across many attacks and the perpetrator's motivations. Domestic violence is a significant, curable public health issue that affects over 32 million Americans, or over 10% of the country's population, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

According to Spain (2004), gender violence is defined as violence committed against women just because they are female. The law recognizes that gender violence is a particular problem in Spain, where there is a high incidence of violence against women. In most of the devastating symbols of the inequalities prevailing in Spain, women are deemed by their attackers to be devoid of the fundamental rights to freedom, respect, and autonomy, according to the law. The realities of that gender are particularly affected by the attacks on women.

Although this type of violence is not the most common, it is frequently used by people to control “their partner” when they are violent against them. There are also other sorts of intimate relationship abuse that occur, including violence committed by women against men and by gay and lesbian couples.

### **Synopsis of *The Enemy of Progress***

The movie *The Enemy of Progress*, as directed by Ebuka Onuma started with a land dispute talk between Uwakwe as played by (Patrick Okoye) and Ugochi, wife to Ezepuo the elder brother of Uwakwe and following the encounter between Uwakwe and Ugochi, the next scene ushered in the domestic abuse meted by Ugochi on her husband Ezepuo.

Ugochi being a traditionalist did not only make use of her magical powers to orchestrate her domestic abuse of the husband but also resulted in both verbal, psychological and physical abuse of the husband.

Not only did Ugochi abuse her husband, but in the succeeding scene she also incited her daughter (Nwugo) into joining hands with her to abuse Ezepuo.

Ezepuo being a retired soldier tries his best to keep the abuse within the family’s eye because the wife is the one catering to the family’s needs and because of what society will say if words should get outside that he is being domestically

abused by his wife and daughter. Thus, this abuse continued to build up to the extent where both Ugochi and Nwugo her daughter resulted to causing Ezeputo to become blind, dumb and incapacitated. The movie ended with Ezeputo giving up the ghost due to the domestic abuse he suffered.

### **Causes of Domestic Abuse against Men in *The Enemy of Progress***

A blend of factors contributes to the increasing rates of domestic abuse in Nigeria. In general, domestic abuse is usually considered a 'private' issue to be taken care of within the family but an intensive look at the consequences or effects of domestic abuse suggests otherwise because the family is a microcosm of the larger society hence, whatever effects of domestic abuse on an individual in the family, transcends directly or indirectly to the society at large. Nigerian men are expected by society to love and care for their spouses. It is believed by many that a man is expected to endure whatever he encounters in his home and to provide and care for his household.

Two key factors help to perpetuate domestic abuse. The first is the inability of many men to escape abuse and domination due to their disadvantaged economic status. Some men still depend solely on the financial resources of their wives probably due to the loss of their jobs or retirement without a pension. This hence

forces them to put up with domination for fear of the withdrawal of this financial support. This factor is of course one of the reasons for the domestic abuse on Ezepuo by his wife because Ezepuo happens to be a retired soldier whose pensions are not paid, hence, the duty of providing for the family rests on the wife's financial proceeds from her farming business. This among others resulted in Ezepuo having no say in his family.

A second crucial factor is a culture of silence that stigmatizes the victims of domestic abuse rather than the perpetrators. Looking at the way that society operates when it comes to men being victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse by way of simply not believing the possibility of men being victims of domestic abuse by the other gender and also referring to such men as weaklings and dismissing their complaints.

The assertion above is evident in the film *The Enemy of Progress* because even though Ezepuo would have loved to let people know about his ordeals with his wife and daughter, he preferred to confine it within himself to the extent he couldn't even tell his brother Uwakwe about it but rather will dismiss the talk of it with his usual phrase of "I am an old soldier and we survive by learning how to live with the enemy". This reinforces the need for raising awareness about male victims of female-perpetrated domestic abuse and to educate the male

gender that they are not to blame for the physical, verbal, emotional, sexual or psychological abuse to which they are victims and thus be encouraged to speak up not just for the sake of their mental health but also for the safety of the society at large.

From the ongoing research, it can be deduced that women engage in domestic abuse because of internal psychological struggles. Usually, women who engage in domestic abuse against the male gender are seeking a sense of power and control over their partners or their own lives, or because they are tremendously dependent on the man and are threatened by any moves on his part towards independence. The statement above is evident in the film under study because the fear of Ezeputo making moves towards independence/freedom from the domestic abuse meted on him by Ugochi his wife was what eventually prompted Ugochi and Nwugo her daughter to make Ezeputo blind, dumb and incapacitated in order to cover their tracks on the domestic abuse against Ezeputo using the magical powers of "Ogugu". This single act of rendering him blind, dumb and incapacitated was the last straw that broke the camel's back because at this point Ezeputo becomes hopeless and helpless.

Some women grew up in violent households, where they watched their mothers abuse their fathers. Like in the movie under study, there is a very high tendency

that Nwugo will abuse any man she ever gets married to because she has already started towing the part of her mother by also joining in on the domestic abuse against her father and it is also evident in the manner with which she abused Ekene (her boyfriend) emotionally and psychologically by telling him that he's never going to make it in life and that she doesn't plan to spend her life with a poor man like him. She furthered the abuse on Ekene by casting a spell on him to become restless whenever he sees her or hears her name and this literarily resulted to a mental breakdown on Ekene.

Domestic abuse often emanates from threats and verbal abuse. And while physical injury may be the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are most times very severe. Just like in the cases of Ezeputo and Ekene respectively in the movie under study, physical abuse is not intense but emotional and psychological abuse were and this is evident in the movie when Ugochi referred to the husband as a weakling because he chooses to do what is right by letting his brother Uwakwe have the portion of land that of course rightly belongs to Uwakwe. Also, Ekene suffered emotional and psychological abuse at the hands of Nwugo who constantly talk down on him because of his economic and financial status.

Emotionally abusive relationships can destroy one's self-worth, lead to anxiety and depression, and make such a person feel helpless and alone. No one should have to endure this kind of pain. This assertion is evident in the relationship between Ekene and Nwugo, the abuse on Ekene by Nwugo resulted in Ekene losing his self-esteem and having to follow her around begging for acceptance, it also literarily transcended to depression, making him stay alone inside his room all day long and refusing to talk to his mother.

There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is fear of your partner. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner - constantly watching what you say and do to avoid a blow-up, chances are that your relationship is not healthy and abusive. Other signs that you may be in an abusive relationship include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

The assertion above is no doubt evident in the movie *"The Enemy of Progress"* because it featured instances where Ugochi referred to Ezepuo as a weakling and this is an act of belittling a partner. Also, Nwugo referring to Ekene as a poor loser with no chances of making it in life is belittling and can cause one to become unnecessarily anxious and depressed.

Furthermore, Ezequo in the movie under study had to always walk on eggshells in his own home, trying as much as possible to not get in the way of his wife due to the suppression on him by his wife.

Finally, the word “respect” as simple as it seems can be the root cause of domestic abuse most times. As the saying goes that respect is reciprocal. When couples respect each other’s opinion there’s the tendency for domestic abuse never to take place between them but in the movie under study, the reverse is the case because Ugochi throughout the movie never for once shows any sign of respect for the husband rather she takes it upon herself to insult and abuse him at will in one of the scenes referring to him as a weakling and in another refusing to give him food and also taunting him by using a stick to beat him on the head in one of the scenes.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it concludes that domestic violence-related content in Nollywood movies that shows men as aggressors and violators of women incite women to turn very aggressive in reality toward their partners as a means of defense against such scenes as seen in these movies. These have caused an increase in the behavior of females being very aggressive towards men lately and



an increase in several breakups in marriages and relationships. The study also concludes that men are ashamed to speak up when they are being abused either verbally or physically by their spouse due to the mentality in Nigeria that a man should be in charge of his home so as not to be seen as a weakling.

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