

# Husband Victims of Marital Violence in Nigerian Muslim Homes: An Islamic Assessment

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## ABSTRACT

*Marital violence is an abusive behavior that is directed towards a partner by another partner in a marriage relationship. There are abound studies on marital violence against women but scanty ones on men. Contrary to the popular opinion that men are not prone to marital violence, studies revealed that they experienced it, but it was under-reported. Nigerian Muslim men are not excluded from this happening, they are abused by their wives. In recent times, the Nigerian media has been saturated with dreadful cases of marital violence against men, including Muslim men. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates marital violence against Nigerian Muslim husbands. The study examines its patterns and causes in the light of Islam. The study is descriptive and analytical, adopting participatory observation and media reportage as major research instruments. The study reveals that Nigerian Muslim men suffered major, physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and social abuses from their wives. The causes of this trend were identified to be vengeance, jealousy, poverty, and ignorance of Islamic ethical rules. The effects of these abuses constitute threats to the health and subsequent death of the victim. These revelations are antithetical to Islamic marital rules of peaceful cohabitation. Hence, the study recommends a proper understanding of Islamic marital ethics before marriage, and the establishment of Islamic family counseling centers where couples can seek guidance on steps to take, particularly during disputes.*

**Keywords:** Marital Violence, Male Victims, Women Abusers, Nigeria, Islamic Viewpoint

## INTRODUCTION

Abuse in marital relationships has been a major concern in the contemporary global world. This marital violence is known by several other names, such as intimate partner violence, domestic violence, family violence, spousal abuse, *et cetera*. Studies have established that abusive behaviors are perpetrated by either or both spouses (National Center for Injury and Control; WHO, 2014). Marital violence is a universal social ill that constitutes serious health concerns across nations, cultures, religions, ethnicities, and classes, with varying degrees of prevalence. The prominent

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kind of marital violence that has gained much attention from researchers globally is the one perpetrated by men against their wives. This was born out of the fact that women are more vulnerable to abuse from their male spouses who have the physical strength and religious-cultural institutional support for the latter to dominate and control them (Taft et al, 2001; Srivastava, 2016). Thus, the abundance of studies on domestic violence against women showcases the patterns, impacts, and other underlying factors that make women susceptible to marital violence globally (UNICEF, 2000; WHO, 2014; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002).

For instance, in traditional African societies, men are recognized as the heads of the family, dominant partners and therefore stronger to overpower their wives (Bowman, 2003). This social power structure is also true of American societies as argued by Hines, Brown, and Dunung, who attributed men's abuse of their wives to their socialized belief that they have the right to control or discipline them anyhow (Hines, et al, 2007). Similarly, religious law was also accused of empowering men to abuse their wives. For example, Qur'an 4:34 was construed by critics to legalize domestic violence against women. This stance was however debunked on the grounds of contradicting the Islamic worldview of justice and fairness to genders (Abu Sulayman, 2006; Ibrahim & Abdalla, 2010). Notwithstanding, studies have established that Muslim women globally are victims of domestic violence from their spouses, likewise their counterparts from other backgrounds (Arango, et al, 2014; Islahi & Ahmad, 2015).

Contrastingly, there were scanty studies on marital violence against men in virtually all societies, which portrayed its negligence (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). The underlying factors for this development were recognized to be multi-dimensional. The religious-cultural hierarchical family order that classified men as the dominant figure was considered a factor that shields men invulnerable to martial violence (Olaseinde & Ogwuche, 2022). Others asserted that men's natural unwillingness to seek help when they experience problems inadvertently led them to a culture of silence in the face of domestic violence (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). In addition, it is a general notion that a man who cannot defend himself against female violence is regarded as weak and is reduced to a laughingstock in society. This makes it rare for men to publicize domestic violence against them, and more importantly, to save their egos from societal derision. In this wise, marital violence against men is circumstantially silenced and under-reported globally (Srivastava, 2016; Enakele, 2019); whereas men, like their female counterparts, experience marital violence of

all sorts virtually in every society (Srivastava, 2016; Enakele, 2019; Hines and Malley-Morrison, 2001; Asekun-Olarinmoye, et al, 2019).

The prevalence of marital violence against Nigerian men was established by Mathew (n.d.), Dienye and Gbeneol (2009); Olaseinde & Ogwuche (2022); Ilika et al (2002); and Adebayo (2014), among others. They noted the less vigor and triviality of society on the plight of domestically abused men. This culture according to them, contributed to the rarity of works on domestic violence against men and why it constituted their silent killer. A new narrative about marital violence against Nigerian men was ushered in with the escalating and scary reportage on domestic violence against them, portraying stabbing, setting ablaze, poisoning, and maiming of the husband or even children by the wife on events of marital discord. Surprisingly, Muslim women are not excluded from this menace despite the Islamic condemnation of cruelty to humans. This scenario turns marriage into a dreadful institution that antagonizes the human serenity envisioned by Islam. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates marital violence against Nigerian Muslim men. The paper examines the patterns of violence and their causes from the Islamic perspective. The study is descriptive and analytical, using media reportage and observation as major research instruments.

### **Patterns of Marital Violence against Nigeria Muslim Husbands**

The patterns of marital violence against Nigerian Muslim men are presented below under the following classifications: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and social violence.

**Physical Violence:** This is an abuse that causes ranges of physical pain or injury to the victim. For instance, Olanshile Nasirudeen stabbed her husband, Jimoh Nasirudeen to death for impregnating another woman; while Muhammad Bello Bilyaminu was stabbed with a knife by his wife for an infidelity accusation (Olatunji, 2021; Adesomoju, 2020). Ifeoluwa sets her husband Bolu Bamidele ablaze with petrol (while the latter is asleep) over infidelity in Koka, Osun state (Agbor, 2022). Odunayo stabbed her husband Olamilekan Salahudeen to death for making an unwanted sexual advance to her in Oko Oba, Oyo state (Chima, 2022). Beatrice, the wife of Oluwatoyin Safiu, poured acid on his husband's body in his attempt to get another wife in Lagos state (Akoni, 2010). Aisha Ali poured hot water on her husband's private part in Fayen-Fayen, Kano state to plan to take another wife (Murtala, 2019). Jumoke Bamgbola was reported for beating her husband, Niyi

Adeyemo over a disagreement (Agbaje, 2022). The alarming rate of cases of wives beating up their husbands was equally lamented by the Lagos state government (Akoni, 2023). Other physical abuses that Nigerian men experience are hitting with dangerous objects, slapping, kicking, destruction of properties, etc. (Enakele, 2019).

**Psychological Violence:** This is any conduct that impairs a man's psychological integrity be it by threat, coercion, humiliation, or such other attitudes which put his dignity into question. The instance of this is deceiving the husband to assume children out-of-wedlock as his (Karkus, 2023; Gorge, 2023). Another form of psychological violence is verbal aggression and blackmailing, as was reported in the case of Rashid Adaramaja who sued his wife for divorce on the ground of blackmailing. In the report, Adaramaja was less bothered when his wife abandoned him and the children for several years; but he became raged on hearing the false accusation peddling around against him (Oluwagbemi, 2017). Men also suffer abandonment and desertion, whereby they are detached from their children and left alone; denigration with serial insults, ridicule, and mockery; threats of divorce or divorce without fair hearing, particularly during the challenging period for men (Adeleke, 2020; Kolo, 2022).

**Sexual Violence:** This is sexual-related oppression of the husband. This can be a total denial of husband sexual intimacy with no just cause, a denial under the pretense of sickness, or mocking, deriding, or scorning with words like "Is sex food?" among others (Ademuson, et al, 2022; Agency Report, 2021). In other instances, wives subject their acceptance of sexual advancement to the fulfillment of demands (Ademuson, et al, 2022; Agency Report, 2021). On another occasion, women use sexual enhancers to outrageously demand sex to deter the man from discharging sexual obligations to other wives. Sometimes, violence is prompted by extramarital relationships as was reported in the case of Muiyiwa among others. Muiyiwa Sikiru on his arrival from a three-month journey, met another man cohabiting with his wife in their house in Akure, Ondo state (The Nation, 2022).

**Social Violence:** It is a behavior that damages a man's integrity or reputation within the family, associates, or society. This abuse includes among others, paternity fraud, whereby children fathered outside marriage are pretended to be those of the husband until the test disclosed the truth (Duru, 2022). In this paternity deceit, Nigeria was ranked '2<sup>nd</sup> highest in paternity fraud in the world' (Ogundipe et al., 2021). The act of bullying or blackmailing of the husband as earlier discussed under the psychological abuse, also constitutes social abuse. Yekini filed a divorce suit

against his wife for her persistent bullying and blackmail (Daily Times, “My Wife Bullies Me”). In other instances, men are disallowed to gain access to children or be involved in their decision-making of them. Such children are also stage-managed not to interact with paternal relations (Ademuson et al, 2022). Spiritual attack is another abuse Nigerian Muslim men are experiencing. This attack is inflicted to hypnotize the man to maintain complete control over him (Agency Report, 2021).

**Economic Violence:** This is a financial-based abuse that is employed to manipulate the economic resources of the husband. Ann Silver carefully enumerates numerous ways women financially abuse men including among others, exerting unreasonable control over the husband’s access to his fund, demanding him to make more money, misusing of family fund, stealing his money, willfully refusing to assist financially, destroying properties, etc. (Silvers, n.d.). Studies revealed that some Nigerian men including Muslims experience the aforesaid economic abuses from their wives (Ademuson et al, 2022). Some women employ varied means to block their husbands’ progress or promotion, to restrict his financial buoyancy to demean or control him or deprive his other dependents from benefiting from him (Ademuson et al, 2022; Slivers).

### **Causes of Marital Violence against Nigerian Muslim Husbands**

Multidimensional reasons were discovered to be the cause of violence against Nigerian Muslim husbands by their wives. These are presented below:

**Vengeance:** Retribution against any perceived wrongdoings of the husband is the most common reason offered by women abusers in previous studies (Swan et al., 2008). This result tallies with the finding in the current study as evident in the cases of Muhammad Bello Bilyaminu and Bolu Bamidele who were stabbed or set ablaze by their respective wives respectively for infidelity (Adesomoju, 2020; Agbor, 2022). The wife of Oluwatoyin Safiu poured acid on him over his attempt to marry another woman, while Aisha Ali poured hot water on hers for the same ‘offense’ (Akoni, 2010; Murtala, 2019). Similarly, shirking of marital and paternal duties on wives and children, misappropriation of women’s wealth, or betraying them also incite women to treat such men with contempt and ignominy.

**Poverty:** The poor economic situation of the husband is rated as one of the major reasons behind his abuse. Aggression from his wife surfaces when his income is insufficient to adequately cater

for the family, or he is unemployed. The ensuing financial hardship subjects such men to serial intentional or unintentional abuses such as denigration, humiliation, not having a say in family affairs, etc. (Ademuson, et al, 2022; Asekun-Olarinmoye et al, 2019). Women's occupational status, educational level, and financial capability, among others, are regarded as contributory factors to their pride and awelessness of their husbands. Many well-to-do women are reported of flagrantly disrespecting their husbands; they make decisions unilaterally, including those on children's affairs. They lukewarmly perform their marital obligation and sometimes subject them to conditions (Ademuson, et al, 2022; Asekun-Olarinmoye et al, 2019). For instance, some male victims lamented that their wives resist their sexual advancement or subject it to fulfillment of stringent conditions like the use of condoms, payment, time, etc. A typical example of this is the case of Odunayo who stabbed her husband Olamilekan Salahudeen for making unwanted sexual advances (Chima 2022).

**Jealousy:** The act of a woman wanting to be the only closest personality to her husband incites fear and suspicion of others including close relations or associates of her spouse. Such women consciously or unconsciously exhibit abusive behaviors to distance rivals from their husbands. They subject their men to digital monitoring and are too suspicious of their activities. Inadvertently, frequent unending disagreements, blackmailing, and victimization predominate the lives of male victims. In the worst scenario, a jealous woman tries to kill her husband for his attempt to get an additional wife as happened in the cases of Oluwatoyin Safiu's wife and Aisha of Fayen-Fayen, Kano (Akoni, 2010; Murtala, 2019). In other instances, fear predisposes women to act violently on their husbands or their relations. This fear includes the fear of intrusion or breakup in family peace which was believed to characterize polygynous homes with constant scuffle between co-wives among others in Nigeria (Egbeolowo, 2020). To avert this happening, some women employ physical, psychological, economic, or social violence against their husbands as analyzed in the previous section of this paper. In addition, some women dominate husbands and refuse association with their families to prevent them from meddling in their affairs. Sometimes, out of desperation, they employ spells to hypnotize and direct husbands at will for their selfish interests.

**Ignorance of Islamic Ethical Values:** Some wives unconsciously abuse their husbands due to their ignorance of Islamic ethical values or the bad orientation they had before their marriage. Such women act aggressively and uncouth to people including their husbands. Islamic condemnable acts

are trivialized and embraced at will. Sometimes, they consent to sinful acts as was the case of Seinab who agreed to have illegal sex with another man (Zina) to get children for her legal husband who was not able to father any child. Seinab said:

When I married my husband 12 years ago, we both swore an oath not to reveal the secret that my husband is not the biological father of the children. And for the past 12 years, we have been keeping that secret by not allowing anybody to know that my husband is not the biological father of the three children and the pregnancy that I am carrying” (Channel Television, “Woman Confirms Husband”).

### **Effects of Marital Violence on Nigerian Muslim Husbands**

It is apparent in the preceding sections the calamitous effects that the shades of marital violence had on Nigerian Muslim men. These are further explained below:

**Physical Harms:** As presented above, many cases of physical violence result in the man’s death, particularly, those of burning, stabbing, poisoning, and pouring of acid among others. In other instances, the man-victim commits suicide or sets himself ablaze as reported by Muritala Afolabi (Bamigbola, 2022). Other victims sustained varied degrees of injury.

**Psychological cum Health Problem:** Health-related issues emanating from abuses Nigerian Muslim men experienced are noted to include mental breakdown, sleep disorder, mood disorder, uncontrolled anger, depression, anxiety, stress disorder, hypertension, etc. as was the case with their counterparts globally (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). In reality, this psychological cum health challenge is the most traumatic to Nigerian men. It is a difficult wound to treat due to its devastating nature on the mind.

**Social Misplacement:** Another effect that marital violence has on Nigerian Muslim men is social malposition. This is evident in cases when men discovered their assumed own children are disclaimed by the mothers as not theirs, or discovered to have been deceived of owning children of extra martial affairs that are later revealed not to be theirs (after spending their life savings on them). Such victims ruminate on questions like, where to start to have their legitimate children. Can they trust women or have them as wives again? Where can they source for funds to start a new life? Some victims refused to get married again and yet have no helper in the house; while others that married are not able to function as balanced and functional husbands. Worst still, the

society looked down on them as incomplete and disrespected personalities. Sometimes, people advise them to pardon their abusers to escape societal stigmatization; or to keep them as companions that will serve their needs.

**Self-injurious Misbehaviors:** Marital violence has spurred some male victims to live on hard drugs or intoxicants to calm down. Though they got temporary relief, but this habit turned them into drug addicts which ushered in more health and social complications. Some men-victims became licentious due to sexual denial as was the case with some culprits accused of incest and or raping of other females around them (Egigogo, 2023; Nan, 2022). Other men patronize prostitutes to fulfill their urges, while others use pick-up girls not minding the implications of such decisions.

**Financial Stress:** Economic violence has subjected some men to financial distress. Some victims could neither freely access their money nor give it out to relations without express permission from their wives. Some lack basic amenities of life, such as payment for rented accommodation, feeding, or catering for family welfare. These financial strains make them look irresponsible and subject them to laughingstock in society. Inadvertently, some victims embraced criminal activities such as defrauding, money-making rituals, etc. to make a living.

### **Islamic Appraisal of Marital Violence against Nigerian Muslim Husbands**

It is incontestable that a major ideal of Islam is the entrenchment of peace in human society. Hence, as a rule, it enjoins goodness to fellow mankind as well as other creatures. Thus, the Prophet said:

Allah has prescribed benevolence towards everything. When you kill a living thing do it in the best manner and so also when you slaughter an animal, sharpen your knife, and reduce its suffering (Al-Nawawi, hadith 17).

If the prescription above did enjoin good disposition to animals what less is expected of the relationship with fellow human beings? It is discernible from this *hadith* that Islam prohibits all forms of violence against the divine creatures (i.e. humans, animals, and other beings); rather, it enjoins kindness and compassion.

Pertinently, in the matrimonial relationship, none of the spouses is allowed to abuse his or her partner under any guise. The husband-wife relationship should normally be based on kindness, faithfulness, and intimacy. Marriage in Islam imposes specific rights and responsibilities on each



of the couples with the desire to attain tranquility and peaceful co-existence envisaged therefrom (Q.30:21). Essentially, it obliges the husband to be kind to the wife and treat her with compassion physically, and psychologically, socially, and financially (Al-Fawzan, 2009). Both the Qur'an and Hadith contain clear instructions in this direction. For instance, the Qur'an decrees on the husband thus: "... and live with them in kindness ..." (Q. 4:19). It is understood from various commentaries that this injunction was even made concerning ugly development in marriage when the husband might likely be repulsive (Maududi, 1991); yet he is required to show kindness, equity (Ali, 1986), patience and empathy (Khalil, 2010) talk less of the happy moments. More importantly, the husband is considered as the maintainer and upholder of his wife (Q.4: 34) providing her with the pillar of support. Moreover, the Prophet (SAW) proclaimed the best treatment for one's wife in several *ahadith* (Al-Tirmidhi, hadith 3895).

In the same vein, the wife is enjoined to be good, faithful, loving, and submissive to the husband while she refrains from harming him (Al-Jibaly, n.d., 66). Kindness to the husband is considered an act of worship which is presumed to be a wife's passport to *Jannah* (paradise) or *Jahannam* (hellfire) (Al-Jibaly, 2005). Indeed, the Prophet declared thus: "If I were to command anyone to make prostration before another, I would command women to prostrate themselves before their husbands, because of the special right over them given to husbands by Allah" (Abu Dawud, hadith 2140). Invariably, it is established that goodness and kindness to a spouse is a reciprocal act as summed up in the Qur'an: "... and women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable ..." (Q, 2:228). It is thus manifest that Islamic marriage bestows on the couple peace of mind, fulfillment, and serenity which promotes love and understanding (Q. 30:21). Nevertheless, when disagreement occurs, mechanisms are instituted to reconcile on a peaceful note (Q. 4:35). However, when the disputes are irreconcilable, then divorce is recommended as the best for both to avoid rancor and trespass of the religious limit.

Given the foregoing backdrop, marital violence has no place in Islam outrightly, talk less of violence against the husband as typically show-cased in the preceding units. Hence, Nigerian Muslim women are not justified to act violently, no matter the genuineness of their cases. All forms of physical abuse are condemned in Islam and, when it results in death it is a grievous sin that attracts capital punishment as enunciated in Q:4: 92-93. More often than not, the physical abuse erupts as a result of vengeance on the husband by the wife. This act is, no doubt, provoked by anger and loss of emotional control on one hand and the spirit of unforgiveness on the other. As

an antidote, the Prophet (SAW) had warned a Muslim against the menace of anger, as reported by Abu Hurayrah:

A man said to the Prophet, "Advise me!" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Do not become angry and furious." The man asked (the same) again and again, and the Prophet (ﷺ) said in each case, "Do not become angry and furious (Al-Bukhari, Book 78, Hadith 143).

The above tradition borders on the gravity of control or loss of anger. Thus, a wife who controls her anger certainly controls her desires, thoughts, and actions; hence, she would hardly result in husband violence. On the other hand, the one who loses her anger might naturally transgress in her emotions and actions by resulting in husband violence even on the slightest provocation. Thus, the golden adage presumes an angry person is a mad person. Aside check against anger, Islam advocates forgiveness in human relationships as thus evident in the Qur'an: "...and who suppress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves the good doers" (Q.3:134). Moreover, the Prophet (SAW) was opposed to vengeance for a personal wrong unless it involved a violation of a divine command. Specifically, he condemned marital violence thus: "You should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself, not strike her on the face, and do not revile her" (Al-Asqalani, *1351AH*, 127). The directive not to strike the spouse nor revile her is, in this context, considered reciprocal. The foregoing instructions eschew the episode of stabbing, physical combat, beating, setting ablaze, chemical attack, destruction of properties, and other likely forms of physical abuse of the husband by the aggressive wife.

Similarly, all forms of socio-psychological torture that women employ to deal with men are against the Islamic ethical teachings of shunning whatever humiliates or intimidates fellow beings. It became worse when such is done on the Islamically highly rated personality of every wife (i.e. husband). Numerous *ahadith* mandated every wife to relate with her husband with absolute humility, faithfulness, and submissiveness so much that the Prophet was inclined to oblige the wife to respect her husband as earlier cited. This exhortation obliterates all forms of verbal aggression, false accusation, blackmailing, and oppression against the husband. Moreover, Islam refrains a wife from anything that will incur the husband's anger. Hence, any form of sexual abuse such as outright denial, provisional conditions for the fulfillment of an obligation, or undue imposition of demands is reproachable. Thus, the Prophet proclaimed: "When a woman has been

called to come to her husband's bed refuses to come and he spends the night angry, the angels curse her till the morning" and "He Who is in the heaven is displeased with her till her husband is pleased with her" (Al-Asqalani, Hadith no. 9, 128).

In addition, to say the least, financial abuse explored by the violent wife is uncalled for because every individual has independence on what he/she owns; hence, Allah says in the Qur'an thus: "... For men is allotted what they earn; and for women what they earn ..." (Q. 4:32). In this case, the wife has no authority whatsoever to question or curtail the husband on his wealth. This provision negates the idea of the operation of a joint account in the family name which gives the wife a license to fetter the husband's expenditure. At best, the wife is entitled to maintenance by the husband according to his means. Thus, Allah decrees on the latter: "Let the rich man spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him" Q.65: 7). It is, therefore, a transgression for the wife to seek the husband's explanation or to deprive him on his wealth whereas, given her weak nature, she is liable to the husband's supervision on her wealth to avert spendthrift.

Above all, it is crucial to observe the fact that marriage is a socio-religious obligation; hence, the contract is guided by the rules and regulations prescribed by Islam. Consequently, needless to say, equity is essential in marriage whether it is monogamous or polygynous. Equity assures that every stakeholder in the relationship is treated fairly. The stakeholders include husband, wife and co-wives, children, parents, and extended relations. Islam is replete with the rights and responsibilities of each category of these stakeholders. Where equity is upheld the menace of jealousy and envy is reduced to a bearable minimum if not eliminated outright thereby preventing marital violence. Moreover, the complementary roles of each spouse to attain a violent free relationship is envisaged by the Qur'anic declaration thus: "... they are your garments and you are their garments ..." (2:187).

## CONCLUSION

Marital violence has often been predominantly conceived as a social malaise that affects the wife who is considered as vulnerable in a marriage relationship. In this study, the paper unraveled not only the prevalence of marital violence against the male counterpart but also underscored the multi-dimensional patterns suffered by the husband in a marriage relationship. While much attention had been paid to the wife victims by the concerned public, this paper did establish that men also are victims of marital violence, but they often bear the suffering in silence for the reason of protecting

their strength and honor. The paper divulged several experiences of marital violence by men with selected sample cases in Muslim homes across Nigeria giving due consideration to the patterns, causes, and effects of the menace. It was discovered that the multifarious patterns of marital violence by the wife were most times triggered by vengeance, poverty, jealousy, and ignorance of the Islamic ethical values; the consequences of which resulted in physical harm, psychological cum health problems, social misplacement, addictions, and financial stress on the part of the husband. Nonetheless, the paper established that these anomalies contradict the objectives of Islam on the institution of marriage and the desired relationship of the spouse in a Muslim home. Hence, the study recommends a proper understanding of Islamic marital ethics through the undertaking of pre-marital courses. It also recommends the establishment of Islamic family counseling centers where couples can seek guidance on steps to take, particularly during disputes.

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