

Spousal homicide in Nigeria: Socio-psychological profiles of men who kill their wives

Journal of Management and
Social Sciences
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Abstract

Without gainsaying, there has been a recent increase in the incidences of spousal homicide in Nigeria. Meanwhile, research on family violence has vigorously focused on spousal abuse, trends and prevalence of domestic violence, while the most severe of violence—the killing of a spouse, has not received an equal amount of attention. Available statistics show that men are more culpable in abusing their wives to the point of death. Leaning on general strain theory, this present study examined the psychological factors and sociological background of men who have been charged and/or convicted of killing their wives. Qualitative analysis of official demographic and offence history data, and in-depth interviews of 21 purposively selected male offenders of spousal homicide in celled housing units in Kirikiri Maximum and Ikoyi Prisons, Lagos State, revealed that childhood experience of violence and abuse is strongly connected with perception and perpetration of violence in marital life. There is a clear empirical evidence to suggest that qualitatively, men who kill their spouses do not differ greatly from those who use nonlethal violence. Demographic and personality traits like negative emotions, low constraints, jealousy and envy were found to be important predisposing factors to spousal homicide. It is essential that an understanding of spousal homicide is continuously pursued and that steps are taken to reduce the likelihood of spousal homicide—the final abuse.

Keywords

Abuse, domestic violence, offenders, psychosocial factors, spousal homicide

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Introduction

Globally, the rising rate of domestic violence, abuse and now homicide account for major public health challenges across the world. Intimate partner violence and spousal homicide have been described as the most extreme forms of domestic violence. According to Ben-Zeez (2014), about 40 percent of all female murder victims in the world (and just six percent of male murder victims) die in the hands of a present spouse or a former lover. Sadly, domestic violence, especially violence against women has been part of the fabric of many societies and cultures worldwide (Barnard, Vera, Vera & *et al.*, 1982; Anderson & Lo, 2011; Bourget & Gagné, 2012; Abayomi, 2014; Kivisto, 2015; Harlon, Brook, Demery & Cunningham, 2016; Aborisade & Shontan, 2017). It is so commonplace that it is often going unnoticed, while it has also failed to garner the level of concern it deserves in light of its devastating effects on family and society as a whole.

Indeed, the amount of reports on cases of domestic killings and spousal homicides in Nigeria has been on the increase in recent times. Though official statistics on spousal homicide in Nigeria has been scanty and inconsistent, newspapers and social media have been awash with reports of domestic killings all over the country. For example, Vanguard News (2012) reported that a 39 year old man, Kehinde Adesanmonye set his wife on fire following disagreement over her collecting a cup of wine from another man during a party they both attended. A middle aged man, Peter Odion killed his wife for eating his food after refusing to cook for him (News Rescue, 2012). In Bayelsa State, a 40 year old man Stephen Ogho-Oghene Akpata stabbed his wife to death after having sex with her over alleged infidelity (Daily Post, 2017). The spate of reports of the scourge in the country is suggestive that spousal homicide is fast becoming one of the most common and frequent types of murder in Nigeria.

This trend has been confirmed by the office of the Directorate of Public Prosecution of Lagos State who remarked that women in the country are now six times more at risk of being murdered by their spouse than by a stranger (The Guardian, 2017). According to a senior officer of the directorate, in the first and second quarter of 2017 alone, there had been 13 cases of spousal homicide treated by the directorate. Meanwhile, Shija (2014) reported that an average of 300-350 women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends in Nigeria annually. Similarly, Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) stated that no fewer than 4,035 cases of domestic violence were recorded in the year 2016 (The Punch, 2017). Adebayo & Kolawole (2013) and Abayomi (2014) posited that 25% of women in Nigeria have to go through an ordeal of domestic violence and every fourth Nigerian woman suffers domestic violence in her lifetime.

Men who kill their partners report experiences of losing control, suspecting infidelity, involuntary separation, jealousy and rage (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Johnson & Hotton, 2003; Polk, 1994; Wallace, 1986). In respect of the

psychological and sociological status of perpetrators of spousal homicide and non-homicidal domestic violence in Nigeria, the empirical literature is extremely limited. This current study was designed to examine the psychological attributes and sociological background of individuals who committed spousal homicide. Spousal homicide was operationally defined in this study as the murder of a wife, husband, ex-wife, ex-husband by his or her current or former intimate partner (husband/wife). In the light of previous findings regarding spousal homicide that vast majority of female-perpetrated homicides occur in the home, as reaction to long-term abuse (Browne, Williams & Dutton, 1999) and as an act of self-defense (Aldridge & Brown, 2013), they (female perpetrators) are excluded from this study.

Literature Review

Forensic psychologists and sociologists have conducted avalanche of studies to examine the psychological, neuropsychological, and sociological factors and determinants of husbands killing their wives in the course of their marriage and after separation. In this section, a review of relevant studies on risk factors for spousal homicide and theoretical orientation is presented.

Risk factors for Spousal Homicide

Approximately one-fourth of male homicide perpetrators were abused as children. Oram, Flynn, Shaw *et al.* (2013), in their study investigated personality and family or origin differences among three groups of domestically violent men and a nonviolent group. They found that individuals that witnessed family violence and/or were victims of family violence are quite susceptible to commit spousal homicide. This finding was corroborated by Stout (1993) in a cross-sectional survey of 23 incarcerated men in Missouri, United States. He reported that a substantial minority (39%) of his sample witnessed parental domestic violence, generally perpetrated by the father against the mother. He equally found that 17 and 9 percent endorsed experiences of childhood physical or sexual abuse, respectively. Similarly, nearly all the sample of spousal homicide perpetrators studied by Daniel and Holcomb (1985) had significant behavioural problems beginning in childhood, whereas nondomestic homicide perpetrators, by comparison, evidenced less severe childhood behavioural problems.

In respect of perpetrators' educational attainment, Campbell, Webster & Koziol-McLain (2003) found that 49 percent of their sample of spousal homicide perpetrators did not graduate from high school, 33 percent earned their high school diploma, 12 percent completed some college or trade school. Koziol-McLain, Webster, McFarlane *et al.* (2006) found that 55 percent of femicide perpetrators who did not commit suicide did not graduate from high

school and that spousal homicide-suicide perpetrators completed slightly higher levels of education. Whereas 65 percent of the sample of male spousal homicide defendants studied by Barnard, Vera, Vera *et al.* (1982) did not complete high school, only 39 percent of the sample reported by Goetting (1989) did not.

Demographics

Empirical studies have postulated that men who kill their intimate partners tend to be in their mid- to late -30s and, on average, older than those who perpetrated nonfatal domestic violence, those who kill other family members, and those who kill nonfamily members (Daniel & Holcomb, 1985; Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Bourget & Gagné, 2012; Oram *et al.*, 2013). In a pre-trial forensic sample of 213 male homicide perpetrators, Daniel and Holcomb (1985) found that those charged with domestic homicide were almost a decade older than those charged with nonfamilial homicide (34.05 versus 26.89). Oram *et al.* (2013), in a large population based study, compared those who perpetrated SH to those who killed another adult family member and found that men who killed their partners were significantly older than those who killed other family members (39.6 versus 32.2). Campbell *et al.* (2003) found that men who perpetrated fatal domestic violence were older than men who perpetrated nonfatal spousal abuse (34.2 versus 21.2) and Rosenbaum (1990) found that SH perpetrators who committed suicide were older than those who did not (33 versus 42).

Unemployment Status

The rates of unemployment among SH perpetrators vary widely across samples, with estimates ranging from 13 to 58 percent (Stout, 1993; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008). Two large-scale studies provided what may be the most reliable estimates of employment rates among male SH perpetrators and suggested that SH perpetrators are more likely to be employed than men who kill other family members, but are less likely to be employed than nonfatal intimate partner violence perpetrators. Oram *et al.* (2013) found that 39 percent of SH perpetrators were unemployed, compared with an unemployment rate of 55 percent among men who killed other adult family members. Campbell *et al.* (2003), in a comparison between fatal and nonfatal intimate partner violence perpetrators, found that nearly half (49%) of all male SH perpetrators were unemployed, significantly more than nonfatal abusers (20%). Similarly, 45 percent of all SH perpetrators in Massachusetts from 2005 through 2007 were unemployed at the time of the homicide.

Theoretical Orientation: General Strain Theory of Spousal Homicide

While a range of theories have been applied to non-lethal domestic violence, limited theorising has been extended to SH perpetration. The most popular of theories all acknowledge personality traits, early childhood experience and social environment, although the role of these attributes varies by theoretical orientation. Previous research has identified the validity of using General Strain Theory as a theoretical framework for explaining non-lethal partner violence (Katz, 2000; Anderson & Lo, 2011).

Sources of Strain

As a means of controlling other people's behaviour and thereby generating compliance, the use of violence or threat thereof, is a prominent theme in much of the literature on lethal and non-lethal male partner violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Klein, 1981; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Johnson, 1995). For example, control as a source of strain is a central hypothesis in research on the backlash effect of domestic violence resources on male-perpetrated SH (Dugan, Rosenfeld & Nagin, 2003). Based on this, male perpetrators that have the need for control may respond with lethal violence to the perceived emancipation of their partners. Considering the relevance of control issues in SH research, it is expected that the failure of men to achieve control in a relationship functions as a source of strain in that they are prevented from achieving a positively valued goal. Similarly, the failure to maintain control has been identified in research on violence in reaction to perceived questioning of male authority (Dobash & Dobash, 1979) and relationship separation (Johnson & Hotton, 2003). This sense of not maintaining control has long been recognised as an important variable in explaining partner violence perpetrated by men (Gondolf, 1985; Polk, 1994).

Negative Emotional Reaction to Strain

Generally, there are diverse views on the concept of leadership. It is often explained in terms of a natural inherent quality that helps individual to rise. As postulated by the GST, strain operates through negative emotions, and the SH literature is filled with accounts of anger, rage and sexual jealousy. The records of coroners of SH cases show presence of morbid jealousy, abandonment-rage, and intense anger, to the extent that some perpetrators report a sense of relief after the incident (Polk, 1994). In interviews, SH perpetrators report higher levels of possessiveness and jealousy than perpetrators of non-lethal violence (Dobash *et al.*, 2007).

Factors conditioning the effect of strain on spousal homicide

Of the conditioning variables identified by GST to increase the likelihood of crime, personality traits, beliefs favourable to crime and associating with criminal peers are particularly relevant in explaining male SH perpetration. In terms of personality traits, GST research suggests that negative emotionality (also known as trait anger) and low constraint (also known as impulsivity) condition the effect of strain on criminal behaviour (Agnew, Brezina, Wright & Cullen, 2002). Although conceptualisations of negative emotionality have seen virtually absent in the spousal homicide literature (Moffitt, Krueger, Caspi and Fagan, 2000) note that feminist and evolutionary theories discuss personality characteristics of male perpetrators of spousal violence in terminology similar to negative emotionality. Moffitt *et al.* (2000) argue that hypersensitivity to perceived threats and expected rejection are important characteristics of negative emotionality in terms of explaining violence.

Research Methods and Data

Research Sites and Settings

Two correctional facilities in Lagos State that accommodates male convicts and awaiting trial inmates of spousal homicide were chosen as study sites for this research. The selection of the prisons was premised on geographic proximity, security level and provision for awaiting trial and convicted inmates for spousal homicide. The sampling frame for this research consists of male maximum and medium security prisoners living in celled housing units in Kirikiri Maximum Prison and Ikoyi Prison. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 21 prisoners that fit the profile of population for the study.

Data

Data for this study consist primarily of in-person interview data collected during April and June of 2017; interview data were supplemented with official data on demographic and sentence-related characteristics and field notes taken throughout the duration of the study. All interviews were strictly confidential; pseudonyms are used throughout this article to refer to participants. The participation rate for the study was high (86 percent), with only three respondents declining to be interviewed. The total sample for this study is 21 male prisoners (convicts and awaiting trial inmates) serving time for spousal homicide. Audio recording were not allowed during the interview, therefore notes of the proceeding were taken down by a research assistant. Interviews averaged forty-five minutes. The shortest interview was eight minutes and the longest lasted one hour fifteen minutes. The variability in interview duration was a product of the semi-structural nature of the interviews, as well as variation among individuals in terms of experience, emotional composure for

the interview (as two of them broke down in tears and could not conclude the interview) and desire to discuss personal experiences with a relative stranger.

Method of Analysis

Data analysis followed the iterative process that often characterises grounded theory in particular, and qualitative research more generally (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). During data collection, extensive field notes on any interactions and observations relevant to the study of domestic violence and homicide were taken. After data collection was concluded, content analysis was done with the use of a qualitative software program (NVivo). Content analysis has to do with the probing of content and themes of text to uncover both definitions contained in the text and those that emerge through the analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). Open coding was used to identify themes apparent in the respondents' narratives through line-by-line analysis. Once initial memos were written and links between themes became clearer, the full body of data was used to begin focused coding. Focused coding helped in ensuring that the themes that emerged from the initial subset of the data were both relevant to and appropriately configured for the full set of data. Focused coding followed a similar line-by-line process to that of open coding, but applied the specific codes that had been identified as important to the theoretical framework.

Research Findings

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

The male perpetrators of spousal homicide from whom the sample of this study was drawn were 21 in number. In spite of the few number of sample drawn, the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents still showed considerable diversity. Data on age, education, mental and physical health history, and status in the prison were obtained from official report while the rest were obtained from offender self-report. The respondents were youthful though only three of them were below age 30, while majority of them (16) were between age 30-40 and only four were above 40 years old. All of them are educated with the least number (2) having secondary education while the rest of them (19) are at least graduates of higher institutions. In respect of the status of the respondents in the prisons, trials of majority of them are still ongoing while only four of them (two of whom are condemned to death) are convicted. Majority of them are of Yoruba ethnic affiliation (11), Christian religion (12) and self-employed (10). The interviews were conducted primarily in English.

Homicide Characteristics

Majority of the respondents (15, 71%) indicated that they had no motive to kill their partner in the event that led to their victims' death. Therefore, they were requested to provide information on the weapons used in the scuffle that led to the death of their wives. The responses of the participants revealed that majority of them used dangerous weapons that are capable of inflicting injuries capable of leading to loss of life. The weapons used are suggestive of high level of abuse and violence that must have characterised the matrimonial relationship that existed between the couples. Knives were the most commonly used weapon (11, 52.4%), followed by strangulation or suffocation (5, 24%). Other weapons included pestle (2, 9.5%), cutlass (2, 9.5%) and acid (1, 4.8%).

Offenders' childhood experience of domestic violence

The place of elections in any democratic process needs not to be emphasised. However, the wide acceptance of any electoral process would mostly be in their growing up years. All the 21 inmates of the selected prisons who are convicts and awaiting trial prisoners described an array of experiences of domestic violence involving their parents and guardians. Sixteen of the 21 respondents expressed that they had abusive childhood where parents and guardians subjected them to 'excessive disciplinary punishments' like 'beating' 'flogging' 'slapping' 'kicks' 'hitting on the head' 'throwing items at me' 'pushing me violently' 'hitting with sticks and other objects.' Majority of them noted that they grew up with such perception that anytime they go wrong or engage in wrongful behaviour, such disciplinary measures would automatically be meted out on them as penalty. Eleven of them described a more intense abuse like 'being locked out to sleep outside their homes,' 'being hit with iron and other dangerous materials that saw them spilling blood' 'being locked up in a room for hours' 'denial of food and drinks as punishment for a day or more' 'hiring third party to beat me up'. Tayo, a 32 year old who is undergoing trial for strangling his wife in her sleep to death volunteered:

I grew up with the belief that it is normal to hit and kick a child as this was the treatment that I underwent in my childhood. In fact, it got to an extent that if I am not beaten for doing something wrong, I get worried or fearful as my father's silence can be more dangerous. It is only after he had beaten me that I will be rest assured that I have paid my debt for that wrongdoing...

In respect of the respondents' witnesses of violent encounters between their parents, 16 of them expressed that they had witnessed frequent occurrences of violent altercations between their parents, 11 added that they had witnessed their parents' fight with other people in their growing up years. The respondents described the fights between their parents as involving fisticuffs,

throwing of items to each other, hitting each other with dangerous items, destroying properties, and engaging in wrestling bouts. According to them, these events were normally 'disturbing', 'saddening' 'embarrassing' to them when they were young. They stated that they reacted by crying, running to their room and locking up themselves, covering their eyes in shame and fear, running out of the house to call for help, making phone calls to relatives, and making attempt to separate them.

History of General Violence

A strikingly high proportion (16, 76.2%) reported that they had previous legal intervention of cases of violence against them. By implication, majority of the respondents had prior cases of criminality against them before the SH incidence. Meanwhile, 15 (71%) of them confessed that they had been having series of violent encounters with their wives before the incidence that led to their (victims') death. Fourteen of them stated that they had never used any form of weapon to fight with their spouse before the incident that led to death while the remaining seven admitted using weapons like knives, cutlery, pestle, wood, portable furniture, belt, electronic gadget, power cable and other related items. All the respondents stated that their use of such weapons is usually unplanned and instinctive. They pick item that is closest to them at that instant when they are involved in such violent encounter with their partner.

Personality Traits and Social conditioning

All the respondents of the study expressed and showed personal characteristics that are indicative of conditions favourable to violence. These are negative emotionality (trait anger), low constraints (acting on impulse) and jealousy/envy traits.

Negative emotionality (trait anger): A striking proportion of the respondents (18, 85.7%) volunteered that they have anger management problem, hypersensitivity to perceived threats and expected rejection. However, only six of them stated that they had sought some form of curative therapy for their problems, while three of them showed signs of denial in spite of expressing traits that suggest they are quick to anger and two of them believed that 'it is normal' to be moved to such anger when faced with such situations in marriages. Majority of them stated that they noticed their aggressive behaviour since childhood but most of them could not relate it to their childhood experience. They mainly attributed it to 'my nature,' 'my weakness', 'my usual reactions' and 'my feelings.' One of them explained further:

...I grew up knowing that I have bad temper. In my primary school days, I used to injure a lot of my

schoolmates and was suspended twice from school at that stage. That is why I try to stay away from people or situations that will put me in bad mood. (Adetunji/39/Kirikiri Maximum)

Low constraints (acting on impulse): Unlike their admittance of negative emotionality, majority of the respondents expressed that they do not have low constraints. Only six of them admitted that they act on impulse and it is such impulsive action that led them into killing their partner. Others attributed their attack on their partner to ‘retaliation’, ‘aggravated anger’, ‘unusual loss of self-control’, and ‘under spiritual manipulation.’ Only three of the respondents reported that it was their intention to end the life of their wives during the event. The rest claimed that the death was accidental as they only wanted to ‘injure’, ‘teach her a lesson’, ‘deal with her’, ‘fight her back’ ‘stop her from killing me’ ‘defend myself’ only for their intentions to go wrong. Alowonle, who was involved in one of the most celebrated cases of spousal homicide in Nigeria, and one of those that claimed ‘self-defence’ as a factor that led to the attack that took the lives of their wives provided details of the encounter.

That morning, it was my birthday; I honestly don’t know what got over her. Although my wife is emotionally imbalanced, she gets angry and destroys things then she comes back begging. That particular day she told me she wanted to celebrate my birthday with me alone and that she had applied for leave for that day at work. We even had sex that morning and all of a sudden, she started accusing me of infidelity just because I was trying to encourage her to work on her temperament. Eventually she said an aunt of hers advised her to leave me and I was shocked because we were in a good mood and of course nothing could have brought that. I was trying to beg her and calm her down because I know how she can be when her mood changes. All of a sudden, she stood up and went to the kitchen and I thought she went to take water or something only for her to come back with a knife to stab me on my hand so I pushed her to the bed and tried to collect the knife from her and I was bleeding. Eventually she used the knife to stab me on my stomach then I tried to escape that was when I knew that she had locked all the doors that I could escape through, although when we were struggling to get the knife we were both cut in several places and I only stabbed her once just because I needed to escape. (Alowonle/36/Kirikiri Maximum)

Jealousy and Envy: Jealousy has often being cited as motive for SH. The respondents were requested to provide details of their relationship with their wives. Majority of those that initiated the attack on their wives stated that jealousy was a strong factor, while those that were attacked by their wives and had to attack as self-defence also indicated that jealousy was responsible for their wives' attack on them. On the account of Mustapha, (a 44 year old condemned to death in Kirikiri Maximum Prison) who bathed his wife with acid for infidelity:

I was not based in Nigeria, although I met her during my visit to Nigeria, we got married and she got pregnant so I travelled back to sort (process) her joining me in America. When I left the country I always send money for upkeep and other things to my wife but she was just not contented. She went back to the prostitution business I met her doing before I got married to her. A friend of mine called me from Nigeria that my wife has gone back to the prostitution business, so I booked the next available flight to Nigeria. When I got to Nigeria, I went to the hotel where I was told she was, when I got there she denied knowing me and called me names in public so the bouncers at the club believed her and felt I was only trying to embarrass her so they beat me till I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I called her to ask her why she did that only for her to tell me that I should give her 1.5 million naira that she needs it for a business she wasn't even concerned (about being beaten) or anything so I got angry. I went to a man who deals with sales and charging of battery and I bought acid and called her back to come for the money. When she arrived, right on the bike I poured the acid on her...

Drug and Alcohol Abuse: Existing literature indicates that men who are addicted to alcohol or drugs are prone to violence against their wives. Though majority of the respondents indicated that they are involved in habitual consumption of alcohols, while only two admitted to taking hard drugs, they however stated that they were not drunk or under the influence of drug prior to the incidence. Eighteen (85.7%) of them stated that they had not taken drugs or alcohol 24 hours to the occurrence of the event.

Discussions

The present study made use of qualitative method to examine the psychosocial profiles of offenders who committed spousal homicide. It explored offenders'

demographics, homicide characteristics, violence history, early experience, personality trait and social conditioning as facilitators of SH. On the demographics of men who kill their wives, existing studies posited that they are usually in their mid- to late- 30s (Daniel & Holcomb, 1985; Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Bourget & Gagné, 2012; Oram *et al.*, 2013). The age distribution of offenders of SH for this study aligns with the position of existing literature as majority of the them were within the age range of mid-to late-30s. However, unlike the postulation of extant literature that unemployment rates among SH perpetrators are usually high (Stout, 1993; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008), respondents of this study are mainly employed with a striking proportion of them being self-employed. However, information on the income that accrues from their employment was hazy as majority of them could not be precise on their monthly or annual income.

In respect of early experience of childhood abuse, studies have asserted that majority of male perpetrators of SH were abused as children (Stout, 1993; Ben-Zeev, 2014; Harlon *et al.*, 2016). The entire respondents of the study expressed varying degrees of abusive experiences that they suffered in their growing up years. Majority of them noted that they grew up with such perception that anytime they go wrong or engage in wrongful behaviour, such disciplinary measures would automatically be meted out on them as penalty. Their description of their childhood abusive experiences align with the study of Stout (1993) who found that childhood victimisation rates among perpetrators are usually high and they experienced sexual and physical abuse. Similarly, Liem and Koenraadt (2008) posited that substantial number of SH perpetrators witnessed parental domestic violence, generally perpetrated by the father against the mother. In this same vein, majority of the respondents stated that they experienced domestic violence between their parents as children. Consequently, an overwhelming majority of them perceives violence and abuse as not good but inevitable.

The personality trait of the respondents lends credence to the position of extant literature on the personality traits conditioning of men who kill their wives. Majority of them volunteered that they have anger management problems and remarkable level of negative emotionality. In a recent study conducted by Harlon *et al.* (2016), they asserted that anger is particularly conducive to criminal involvement and accounts for substantial rate of SH. This finding also aligns with the postulation of general strain theory that hypersensitivity to perceived threats and expected rejection are important characteristics of negative emotionality in terms of explaining violence (Moffitt *et al.*, 2000). The position of GST further suggests that individuals who are violent towards others as well as their partners do display impulsive personality characteristics (Grann & Wedin, 2002). There were substantial evidences from this study that jealousy and envy play predominant role in promoting spousal homicide. Despite the frequency with which jealousy appears in the literature, the related construct of envy has received minimal

attention. It is likely that both jealousy and envy are present in many cases of SH (Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Kivisto, 2015).

Finally, finding of this study is inconsistent with prior reports that lifetime substance prevalence of illicit substance is a predominant factor in SH (Daniel & Holcomb, 1985; Grann & Wedin, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Anderson & Lo, 2011; Kivisto, 2015). Empirical literature have pointed out that drugs and alcohol use are major contributing factors to spousal homicide, while women that are suffering severe abuse also take to alcoholic use as a coping measure (Goetting, 1989; Kivisto, 2015). The respondents, though active consumers of alcoholic substances, stated that they were not under the influence of drug and alcoholic abuse at the time of the incidence.

Conclusion

Although both male and female intimate partners kill as a result of the breakdown of intimacy, different motivations promote the homicide. This study examined the socio-psychological attributes of male-perpetrators of spousal homicide. This is in order to cover gap in research by providing gender dimension to a phenomenon that is previously considered to be gender neutral. There is a clear empirical evidence to suggest that qualitatively, men who kill their spouses do not differ greatly from those who use nonlethal violence. Therefore, every man that abuses his wife is a potential wife-killer. Indeed, there are psychological risk assessments for spousal abuse based on theoretical positions, which allow for objective measurement of propensity of a man to be abusive and also commit spousal homicide. In spite of this, there is no absolute measure for spousal homicide.

Existing theories of SH provide significant contributions toward explaining how male entitlement and control, subcultural attitudes, lack of access to resources and situational factors contribute to SH. The adoption of general strain theory by this study offered an opportunity to extend current theoretical knowledge in various ways. First, it provides gender sensitivity to a phenomenon that is initially believed to be gender-specific or gender-neutral. Second, it provides light to the understanding of the role of emotions, a variable that is largely neglected in SH research. Third, it offers explanations in the coping mechanisms of individuals that experiences strain and negative emotions and identifies moderating variables that contribute to coping mechanisms.

There is no gainsaying about the fact that spousal homicide is taking an ominous turn in Nigeria, as apart from the higher prevalence, reactions of women to abuse are becoming more deadly. Therefore, more research attention should be paid to examining the psychological and sociological risks factors of the phenomenon. At present, SH research often depends on official data such

as newspaper reports, police records and sentencing information. Although informative, these sources offer only static snapshots of the incident and provide limited insight into the dynamic context of homicide perpetration. There is need for more studies to innovatively give voice to victim experiences through interviews with proxy (relatives and/or friends), attempted SH victims and perpetrators of SH. These studies are important in that they inform risk assessment tools and prevention strategies.

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