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Research Article

Power Imbalances Among Intimate Partners in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area

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Abstract

People tend to believe that power imbalance that women and men experience in an intimate relationship is natural, the way it should be and of course, something that should not be debated. The problem with this argument and/or generalisation is that it usually suggests that hegemonic masculinity should not be interrogated. In Africa, power imbalances are one of the challenges that have limited women in society. This practice is influenced by culture, religion, traditional practices and laws which influence perceptions, and expectations of people in intimate relationships. This study, Power imbalances among intimate partners in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, encapsulates the dynamics of gender power relations that exist in intimate, heterosexual relationships in four communities. This study seeks to examine intimate partners' perception of decision making, the extent of its social acceptability and relevance of their socio-economic circumstances towards power imbalances. The population for this study was twenty-seven thousand three hundred and fifty-five. Sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamame determination technique which stood at three hundred and ninety-four. The study employed a survey research design which consisted of twenty-two items on a four-point Likert scale of (Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). Simple percentage (%) and frequency table was used to analyze the data. The study found that partners socio-economic circumstances did not reflect a significant degree of influence on power imbalances. This study therefore, recommend for responsive gender equality programmes that support and empower both partners.

Keywords:
Gender; Obio-Akpor Local Government Area; Intimacy partners; Power imbalances; Relationships

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Introduction

Not long ago, power imbalances is increasingly recognized in most relationships as some element that fuels inequalities and conflict among intimate partners, particularly those in heterosexual relationships. Hidden powers exist and structure many partners' interactions despite their true and good intentions to each other [11]. Repeatedly, partners speak as if they are fully equal, unaware of the ways subtle gendered power affects their relationships, which has led to some partners hurt and frustrated, but they do not know why [21]. In Africa, power imbalance is one of the challenges that have held women back in society combined with religious, cultural influences and the patriarchal nature of the African society [12].

In this day and age, it is believed scholars are currently looking beyond individual behaviours to specific factors and/or conditions that influence behaviour. These factors may include but are not limited to - social norms, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity [5]. The influence of these factors contributes to gender-based circumstances within intimate partners' relationships of cis-heterosexual men and women as shown in various literatures [21]. Gendered power imbalances, essentially, influence sexual interactions and decision making in which cases may increase a partner's degree of vulnerability to gender-based violence [29]. These influences determine people's views and perceptions of social issues through a cultural lens which had made it to be inappropriate for women to criticize and/or challenge their subjugation presented in their partner's decision without labels [14] This is predominant, especially, in highly patriarchal societies like Africa where women often find it difficult to express themselves for fear of appearing rebellious [17].

Similarly, these cultural expectations are shrouded in the ideals of society which can be considered stumbling blocks for successful contemporary relationships among the millennia [6]. In most societies, the male partner is expected to be older than the female partner, further expanding the power differential, diffusing power imbalances in relationships particularly in Nigeria where age and seniority are of considerable importance in social life [3]. In intimate relationships among cis-heterosexual partners, the female partner is by norms expected to honour, obey and submit to the authority of the male partner, a situation that sustains male dominance. As a result, many potential male partners seek for younger female partners who are even more vulnerable, in the misconception that they are more loyal and submissive.

Substantially, all these factors widen power imbalances among intimate partners which makes it difficult for female partners to discuss issues like sex, consent and sexuality with their partners especially when they are older and more sexually experienced [10]. By this assumption, they are not able to successfully negotiate safe sex on equal footing with their partners including other life choices and decisions. The unequal partner is not able to negotiate choices or take decisions individually or collectively; this is because, in unequal gender relations, abuse is inevitable. Due to the following submission, [12] asserts that underlying all abuses exist power imbalances between partners.

The situation of power imbalances among intimate partners may differ across the urban, pre-urban and the rural areas and these differences can be associated with the influence of socio-economic circumstances, predominant cultural practices and local nuances that uniquely affect women. According to [22] the most dominant religious value system among the Muslims is Purdah and Izzat which encourages

the segregation of the sexes and the incarceration of women to the family home. While the Christian religion sees an ideal woman as one who is humble, submissive, and does not question the authority of a man [4]. These religious influences infuse power imbalances among partners of which can be argued to have contributory factor to myriads of gender-based violence and abuse.

There are about four types of abuses as identified in the literature and they are: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and economic abuse. Physical abuse involves some physical contact between the victim and the abuser and it is well documented throughout history [13]. Emotional abuse, however, is an indirect psychological maltreatment, mostly the non-physical abuse that victims experience at the hands of their abuser and/or oppressor. For example, verbal attacks and humiliation carried out to either control and/or diminish the victim by the abuser [13]. This verbal degradation, harassment, and belittling are some of the strategies used to control or overpower a partner in a maladaptive relationship [20]. While, economic abuse touch on restriction of a partner's financial resources by the abuser such as in giving out small amounts of money to an economically dependent partner, forcing the victim to be perpetually dependent.

Although, another form of economic abuse can be forced deposit of partner's earnings into the abuser's bank account, a situation that takes away cash from the victim against their will [26]. The authors added that in this type of abuse, money tends to be an extension of the abuser's power [26]. In gender-based violence/abuse, it is believed that for every form of domestic violence, the abused feels powerless and believes that they cannot prevent and/or end the damage and pain the abuse has caused them [16]. As an addendum to the forms of abuses expressed above, sexually abused partners may experience refusal of sex and/or use of force to obtain sex which overrides the concept of consent. An abusive relationship is marked by a decrease of freedom on the part of an abused partner, an attempt to control and keep the abused silent [20].

Besides domestic violence, other forms of oppression exist in unequal gender relations between female and male partners, in education, income-earning, and socio-economic status which is powered by male privilege and do not allow female partners to self-support and be in charge of their lives. Long ago, the United Nations Systems rolled out several treaties, frameworks and conventions to address issues around gender inequalities both in public and private spaces one of which are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979, outcome document of the World Conference on Women in Beijing, China 1995, and the African Charter on Gender and Development. These documents remain crucial to understanding and addressing issues of gendered power relations both in policy framing and programmatic designs. In Nigeria, major highlights of 2019 include news of intimate partner violence– from killing of one's partners to serial killing of young women by a male sex predator in Rivers State [15].

A close assessment of the above-referenced circumstances offers a tale-tall a story of power imbalances in intimate partner's relationship in the Nigerian society. An increase of intimate partners' violence presents with other forms of human rights issues such as making more orphan and vulnerable children, loss of societal values, and increased burden on the social institution [15]. Following this evidence, this study seeks to examine power imbalances among intimate partners in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area (LGA).

Literature Review

Scholarly works are reviewed with discussions on the subject matter being power imbalance among partners. Studies reveal varying perspectives about its nature, causes, impacts, and resolution techniques. Similarly, the concepts of power imbalances among intimate partners will be extensively examined individually in relation to each other and from various dimensions by reputable scholars. Evaluating this perspective will form an entry point of this study, which will thus give credence to this study. The researcher, therefore, employs theoretical, conceptual and empirical frameworks in its literature review.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employed for this study is the Radical Feminist Theory. This theory resonates significantly with issues around power imbalances among intimate partners relationships. It, however,

advocates for reordering of society through the elimination of male supremacy [7]. Radical feminist theory believes that society is fundamentally patriarchal in nature and men dominate and oppress women at will. For this reason, the radical feminist theorists' targeted advocacy was to abolish patriarchy completely so that women can be liberated including challenging of existing negative social norms and institutions.

According to [9] unequal gender power relations among intimate partners can be said to have originated and sustained by the societal patriarchal structure. Because patriarchal society promotes class oppression in which men oppress women since the inception of humanity. Radical feminist theory, therefore emphasizes equal individual rights and liberties for women and men despite their biological and sexual differences. Radical feminist theory has become the most widely accepted social and political philosophy among feminists [2]. Similarly, Liberal feminists defend the equal rationality of the sexes and emphasized the importance of structuring social, family, gender and sexual roles in ways that promote women's autonomous self-fulfillment [2]. They emphasize the similarities between men and women rather than the average differences between them, attributing most of the personality and character differences between the sexes to the social construction of gender which tends to promote a single set of roles for both men and women [18].

Extrapolating from the radical feminist theory, it can be asserted that men benefit from the oppression of women. Radical feminist theory generally believes that most men always benefit from the oppression of all women. And that patriarchy creates some form of dominance in relationship, where one party is the dominant and exploits the other (submissive) for the benefit of the former [2]. However, according to radical feminist theory, men use social systems and other methods of control to keep women suppressed and this makes it sensible to say that by abolishing patriarchy as a social norm, there would be elimination of power imbalances among intimate partners and this would promote the enjoyment of equal power and status among partners; and ultimately lift efforts towards achieving gender equality both in public and private life [2].

For partners in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area (LGA), unequal power imbalances remain significantly high, the same as in any other society in Nigeria [27]. In typical local communities, like those selected for this study, female partners are most likely to be unheard of and unseen. Female partners are appreciated when they are not seen questioning the dominance of and every decision of their male partners. Most female partners are likely to be economically deprived – stay at home wives and partners, are not encouraged to pursue conventional career paths, but just a few. However, this situation mostly occurs with less educated female partners, but again, the educated ones would rather submit to this system, attributing such power imbalances to what is obtained in their religion and culture. [28] affirms that this practice and belief are, however, questioned by radical feminist theorists, positing that religion and culture are elements that maintain male supremacy, dominance, and patriarchy in intimate partner's relationship. Ideally, radical feminist theorists propose full, equal, gendered power relations among intimate partners, where persons who are romantically involved uphold their individual agencies, own their bodily autonomy and equally make decisions for their health, rights and wellness without question [29]. To this end, this study seeks to examine decision making, socio-cultural acceptance and socio-economic circumstances affects power imbalances among intimate partners.

Conceptual Framework

Gendered Power

In all known societies, on the average, men appear to have more power than women. Understanding how power is gendered is important to understanding not only gender inequality but also how gender inequality maintains power imbalances among intimate partners [19]. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, power is defined as possession of control, authority, or influence over others. In intimate partners relationship, gender shapes power even up to the highest level of political decision making. Inequality between men and women is about the most persistent pattern over the years and has affected the distribution of power.

In most societies, what it means to be a woman is to be powerless (quiet, obedient, accommodating) while being a real man is directly opposite (outspoken, in-charge, able to issue command) [12]. Society

sees outspoken women who care to speak up in public spaces as misfits, and this is a challenge to women who intend to gain access to decision-making and even in their own private life. It is generally believed that power equals masculinity, further supporting the notion of why most powerful people often demonstrate dominance in a way that is attributable to being male even when it is disrespectful.

In Nigeria, male cis-heterosexual partners assert masculinity (like the man of the house status) by making entirely most of the household decisions. This attribute, most time, put women in a subordinate and exploitative position. A good female partner in Nigerian local parlance is referred to as "wife material" one with obvious demonstration of wifely and motherly attitudes, a position many cultural feminists hold firmly to [1]. For example, the belief that women are better able to achieve peace in conflict situations re-emphasised their non-threatening roles as sisters, mothers, and wives. This is to say that females have the ability to build capacity in others rather than to dominate them which suggests an alternative idea of power: the capacity to transform and empower oneself and others [19]. Therefore, the alternative perspective highlights that women can sometimes, have special forms of influence on decision-making because of their specific social status howbeit intrinsic in nature. It is important to understand that power issues do not dissolve simply because two people are in love [19]. Power is an inevitable and necessary part of human interaction, which is best when it is shared and used respectfully.

Intimacy

An intimate state can be very difficult to maintain except when partners hold equal status which involves complete psychological openness and willingness to be vulnerable. There are different layers of intimacy which includes but not limited to – physical and emotional intimacy [10]. In this study, the concept of intimacy plays a critical role in the understanding of how partners experience relationships and how they move along the sexuality pathway [30]. It is the desire of every human being alive to attend satisfaction in their relationship. Through intimacy, people are able to build social networks, strong emotional support with one another which is necessary for mental health and wellness [28]. Intimacy reverberates the feeling and need to be wanted and close to one another [8].

Moreover, the meaning and degree of intimacy vary within and between relationships. And to maintain intimacy for a longer period of time, relationships must evolve around emotional and interpersonal awareness. Because intimacy involves the ability to be both separate and together in an intimate relationship [6]. It is important for partners to have the ability to differentiate themselves from the other even within the state of mutual vulnerability. Successful intimacy can create a finite bond for partners, although problems associated with intimacy among partners include difficulty in maintaining relationships due to experienced human limitations of each other, and fear of adverse effect of disrupted relationships [10]. Also, factors like unemployment, unresolved differences, prolonged separation, new career opportunities, and a higher level of communication and support can affect intimacy. These factors affect the strength and weaknesses of an intimate partner relationship [21].

Gender Equality

Globally, gender equality features in most development and related fields of discourse. As stated by Mahoney and his co-authors, gender equality can be described as having equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of one's gender, including economic participation and decision-making [14]. For this study, any reference to gender will only be made within the binary gender definition of (male and female). According to [23], gender equality means that women, men, girls, and boys can enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, and protection without discrimination based on their gender. This also includes the elimination of all harmful practices and discrimination against women and girls for example oppression, exclusion from decision-making, sexual and gender-based violence.

In corroboration with the above, [24] report shows that despite many international agreements affirming women and girls' human rights, women and girls however are more likely to be poor and illiterate when compared to men and boys. They have less access to property rights and ownership, credit, training, and employment – far less likely than men to become decision-makers and more likely to be victims of domestic and sexual and gender-based violence. Due to this, gender equality is listed number five of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an ambitious dream of the world leaders coordinated by the

United Nations to advance the development of the world, in more sustainable ways that it meet the needs of the present living people without compromising the needs of the future generation Assembly (2015).

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is the survey research. The survey research design is a non-experimental descriptive research method that helps the researcher to collect data on the phenomenon, describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or characteristics of the population which cannot be directly observed. The design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher ample opportunity to collect data about the construct and concept under consideration.

Study Area

This study is conducted in the Obi-Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. This is one of the 26 LGAs in the State, situated in the metropolitan center of the state capital. The LGA is a major hub of economic activities in the Niger Delta region. The LGA covers about 260 km^2 – Density: 2,489/KM square with population over 464,789 (2006 census). Its headquarters is at Rumuodomaya. The LGA has 11 wards, 65 communities/ township and/or suburbs. For the purpose of this study, the researcher, purposively selected four (4) communities – two urban and two pre-urban. Table 1, Table 2, Table 3.

Population for the Study

The target population of the study will include cis-heterosexual male and female individuals. These individuals are residents in the two urban and two pre-urban communities in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area. They were obtained from an official source such as the National Population Commission (2006) on the basis that the researcher can access information from them. The total population of the select communities is twenty-seven thousand three and fifty-five (27,355) persons. Table 4, Table 5.

Table 1. Population distribution across Obio-Akpor disaggregated by age

Age	Population
0-9 years	104,722
10-19 years	94,806
20-29 years	119,133
30-39 years	74,851
40-49 years	38,675
50-59 years	17,515
60-69 years	7,082
70-79 years	2,960
80+years	2,606

Table 2. Population distribution across Obio-Akpor disaggregated by gender

Gender	Population
Male	238,951
Female	223,399

Table 3. Population distribution across Obio-Akpor disaggregated by age group

Age	Population
0-14 years	150,679
15-64 years	303,616
65+ years	8,055

Source: National Population Commission of Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics online 2006

Table 4. Population distribution of select communities in Obio-Akpor LGA

Name of Community	Number of Male	Number of female	Total Population
Choba	2,708	3,728	6,436
Elelenwo	3,280	3,672	6,952
Trans-Amadi	2,693	2,701	5,471
Woji	4,718	3,778	8,496
Total	13,399	13,879	27,355

Source: National Population Commission, 2006

Table 5. List of communities (urbans and pre-urbans) within Obio-Akpor LGA

Urban Communities	Pre-urban Communities
Umorukakolisi	Alakahia
Rumuolumeni	Atali
Rumuobochi	Awalama
Rumuodomaya	Choba
Rumuoji	Egbelu
Rumuokoro	Elelenwo
Rumuokwu	Eligbam
Rumuokwachi	Elimgbu
Rumuokwuota	Elioparanwo
Rumuokwurusi	Eliozu
Rumuola	Eneka
Rumuolukwu	Eligbolo
Rumuomasi	Iriebe
Rumuomoi	Mgbuesilaru

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Table 5 (continued)

Urban Communities	Pre-urban Communities
Rumuosi	Mgbuosimini
Rumuoto	Mpakurche
Rumurolu	Nkpa
Rumuwaji	Nkpelu
Rumuwegwu	Ogbogoro
Trans Amadi	Oginigba
Woji	Oro-Igwe
Rumudara	Ozuoba
Rumuibekwe	Rukpokwu
Rumuigbo	Rumuadaolu
Mgbuoba	Rumuaghaolu
Oroazi	Rumualogu
Rumueme	Rumuchiorlu
Rumuepirikom	Rumudogo
	Rumuekini
	Rumuekwe
	Rumuesara
	Rumuewhara
	Rumukalagbo
	Rumunduru
	Rumuobiokani
	Rumuogba
	Rumuokparali

Source: Obio-Apkor LGA Council, 2019

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Non-probability sampling was used to select the communities. It is a less demanding method [25]. This sampling method helps to draw random probability sampling due to time and cost considerations as there are more than seventy-three communities in Obio-Akpor LGA thus the reason for use of this sampling technique. Another reason is because of its speed, cost-effectiveness, and ease of availability of the sample. The researcher grouped the communities into urban and pre-urban based on what the researcher considers metropolitan areas and communities considered as largely local residential areas on the outskirts of the city. Two communities were chosen to represent urban area which are Trans-Amadi and Woji and two for pre-urban areas which are Elelenwo and Choba. To determine the sample size, the Taro-Yamane sample size determination technique was deployed. The formula is given thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1=N(e)^2} \qquad n = \frac{N}{1+N(0.05)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Total Population (27,535)

E = The degree of error expected (0.05)

Thus:

n = 27535/1+27535(0.05)2

= 27535/1=27535(0.0025)

n = 27535/26

=394.235

= 394. (by approximation)

The sample size of the study is three hundred and ninety-four.

Sources of Data

The study utilised both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source involved the administration of copies of closed-ended questionnaire. The secondary source consisted of information from available literature, academic journals, files, magazines, textbooks, newspapers, official documents, websites, research reports, and other reference books found in the library.

Methods of Data Collection/Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was (APP) (Attitude, Perception and Practice) questionnaire. The reason for use of this tool was to examine respondents' attitude, perception and practice of power imbalances among intimate partners in Obio-Akpor LGA. This instrument is a closed-ended questionnaire which consists of twenty-two (22) items on a four-point Likert scale of Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. A total of three hundred and ninety-four (394) copies questionnaire was administered. The instrument was structured into two sections; Section A: captures the demographic information of respondents, Section B: includes items capturing the elements required to answer research questions.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument was self-constructed and was evaluated by the project supervisor through conventional means of discussions and consultations and other experts. Also, the instrument was pretested with a pilot of the sample population to determine appropriateness and simplicity of language use. This ensures the detection of obscurities, questions that might not be easily understood, or those that would have proved unconnected to the objectives of the study. Feedback from these different methods of evaluation helped to improve upon the entire instrument to take care of the observed shortcomings which enhanced the validity and made the instrument clear and valid for the research work. Furthermore, to test the reliability of the research instrument, test-retest method of testing reliability was used in the study. A sample of the instrument was distributed to four intimate partners each across the select communities. The result of the test-retest shows that the instrument is capable enough to elicit the socio-cultural nuances prevalent in the study area. Test-retest reliability measures the consistency of results when the same instrument is repeated on the same sample at a different point in time (Trizano-Hermosilla & Alvarado, 2016).

Test-retest reliability can be used to assess how well a method resists these factors over time. The smaller the difference between the two sets of results, the higher the test-retest reliability.

To measure test-retest reliability, you conduct the same test on the same group of people at two different points in time. The reliability of this instrument stood at 98.5 percent.

Formula Used: Reliability = N / (N - 1) x (Total Variance - Sum of Variance for Each Question)/Total Variance where, N is no of questions.

Methods of Data Analysis

The simple percentage (%) and frequency table was used to analyse the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the survey data points via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

This chapter gives an explanation of the data obtained during the field work. It is structured around the objectives with specific field data presented under each objective. These findings signify important entry points to discussing issues of power imbalances with particular focus on this study among intimate partners.

Research and Analysis

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of three hundred and fifty-nine (359) copies of the questionnaire were retrieved successfully making the response rate 91 percent.

(Table 6) showed that 44.3 percent of respondents are between ages 18-24, 40.7 percent are between ages 25-31, while 15.1 percent are between ages 32 and above respectively. Female respondents represent 68.2 percent while the male respondents represent 31.8 percent. Marital status of the respondents indicates that 59.3 percent of the respondents are single, 33.1 are married, 5.6 percent are widowed, 6 percent are divorced and 1.4 percent are separated. Educationally, majority of the respondents 50.7 percent have their bachelors, 22.3 percent have their First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) and could do basic reading and writing while 27.0 percent have post graduate degrees. Concerning the respondents' employment status, 16.2 percent are employed within government agencies or in the private sector. 41.8 percent are self-employed and engaged in some form of craft and petty trading as well as in subsistence and commercial agriculture. The unemployed respondents make up 42.1 percent. In terms of their monthly income, majority of the respondents (36.2 percent) earn income between ₦30,000. 33.4 percent earn between ₦31,000 and ₦121,000.00 per month, while 30.1 percent earn above ₦121,000 per month. This demographic analysis thus, describes class differentials and socioeconomic circumstances of the respondents.

Table 6. Socio-demographic information of respondents

Demographic characteristics	Frequency
Age	
18-24	159
25-31	146
32 and above	54
Total	**359**
Sex	
Male	114
Female	245
Total	**359**

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Table 6 (continued)

Demographic characteristics	Frequency
Marital status	
Single	213
Married	119
Widowed	20
Divorced	2
Separated	5
Total	**359**
Educational qualification	
FSLC	80
Bachelors	182
Postgraduates	97
Total	**359**
Employment status	
Employed	58
Self-employed	150
Unemployed	151
Total	**359**
Socio-economic status (earning power)	
0 – 30,000.00	130
31,000 – 120,000	120
121,000 – above	109
Total	**359**

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2019

Perception on Decision making among Intimate Partners

Regarding respondents' perception on decision making, Table 7 reports that 64.9 percent of respondents disagree that the male partner (husband) should make all the decisions in the home without consulting the female partner (his wife). 60.2 percent disagree that it is inappropriate for the female partner to make decisions at home. 54.0 percent disagree that the female partner should not negotiate choices or take personal decisions at home. 68.2 percent fail to agree that when a female partner seeks to have an opinion in household decision making, she will be disloyal. 71 percent disagree that rich male partners should make all the decisions in the home because they provide for everyone. 61.8 percent disagree that female partner cannot decide when and when not to have sex with her male partner in their relationship. 67.4 percent disagree that only the male partner should determine the number of children to be born in a union. 45.7 percent disagree that the female partner must always seek permission from her male partner before making any decision, and 66.9 percent disagree that there must be a gap between the male partner and female partner in education attainment, and income earning.

Table 7. Distribution of responses on decision making among intimate partners

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
The male partner (husband) should make all the decisions in the home without consulting the female partner (his wife).	20	48	58	93	140
It is inappropriate for the female partner to make decisions at home.	19	57	67	116	100
A female partner should not negotiate choices or take personal decisions at home.	19	86	60	101	93
When a female partner seeks to have an opinion in household decision making, she will be disloyal.	11	51	52	111	134
Rich male partners should make all the decisions in the home because they provide for everyone.	12	41	51	90	165
The female partner cannot decide when and when not to have sex with her male partner in their relationship.	15	65	57	101	121
It is only the male partner that should determine the number of children to be born in a union.	25	43	49	104	138
The female partner must always seek permission from her male partner before making any decision.	49	89	57	92	72
There must be a gap between the male partner and female partner in education attainment, and income earning.	12	57	50	99	141

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2019

Relevance of Socio-economic Circumstances of Partners for Power Imbalances Among Intimate Partners

(Table 8). reports on the relevance of socio-economic circumstances of partners for power imbalances among intimate partners. 64.9 percent fail to agree that partners' socioeconomic background would determine the level of power they individually hold in their relationship; 75.2 percent disagree that a female partner should not be well educated so that she does not seek equality with her male partner (husband); 70.4 percent disagree that a very rich female partner will not be submissive to her male partner and 67.1 percent disagree that an educated female partner should have equal power with her male partner.

Extent of Social acceptability of Intimate Power Imbalances Among Partners

(Table 9) shows the extent of social acceptability of power imbalances among intimate partners. 66.0 percent of respondents disagree that female partners must never express themselves before their male

Table 8. Distribution of responses to assess the relevance of socio-economic circumstances of partners for power imbalances among intimate partners.

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Partners' socioeconomic background would determine the level of power they individually hold in their relationship.	22	51	53	114	119
A female partner should not be well educated so that she does not seek equality with her male partner (husband).	12	27	50	102	168
A very rich female partner will not be submissive to her male partner.	15	49	42	110	143
An educated female partner should have equal power with her male partner.	28	39	51	121	120

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2019

Table 9. Distribution of responses on the extent of social acceptability of power imbalances among partners

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Female partners must never express themselves before their male partners.	27	58	37	98	139
In a relationship, the female partner is bound by norms (traditions) to honor, obey and submit to the authority of her male partner.	50	85	43	90	91
The male partner has a right over the female partner including withdrawal of certain privileges from her.	21	65	40	113	120
Education and career make a female partner disrespectful to her male partner.	14	28	47	120	150
When a female partner has less power in her relationship, it will make the relationship last long.	17	52	45	100	145
The male partner is always right in the relationship.	26	48	45	105	135
Equal power relations allow partners to create intimacy and enjoy relationship success.	76	74	51	88	70
Unequal power relations give rise to gender-based violence in the relationship.	51	81	71	83	73
Unequal power relations take away an individual partner's ability to be happy, healthy and well	54	72	59	105	69

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2019

partners. 50.4 percent fail to agree that in a relationship, the female partner is bound by norms (traditions) to honor, obey and submit to the authority of her male partner. 64.9 percent disagree that the male partner has a right over the female partner including withdrawal of certain privileges from her. 64.9 percent disagree that education and career makes a female partner disrespectful to her male partner. 75.2 percent disagree that when a female partner has less power in her relationship, it will make the relationship last long. 68.3 percent disagree that the male partner is always right in the relationship. 44.0 percent disagree that equal power relations allow partners to create intimacy and enjoy relationship success; 43.4 percent are at variance that unequal power relations give rise to gender-based violence in the relationship and 48.4 percent disagree that unequal power relations take away an individual partner's ability to be happy, healthy and well.

Discussion of Findings

We found that 68.2 percent of the respondents were females, while 31.8 percent were males.

Decision Making Among Intimate Partners

We found that female partners are socio-culturally disadvantaged in terms of decision making. Most of the respondents agree that the male partners consult with their female partners before making decisions. However, 38.4 percent agree that female partners must always seek permission from her male partner before making any decision, at all. The respondents, therefore, disagree with other questions under decision making. This finding is in line with what (Asiyanbola, 2005) discussed in a paper presentation at the XXV International Conference Tours, Francia. It was stated that women are socioeconomically disadvantaged in-home fronts because they had to depend on the men to make all the decisions. Indeed, most respondents believed that female partners should be involved in the decision-making process, especially, when the female partner is educated and working so that she can contribute and bring smart ideas to the table. However, there are exceptions when it becomes a matter of life and death. This again points to the importance of being in a relationship with an educated and enlightened partner to guarantee quality decision making, particularly, for the female partner.

Relevance of Socio-economic Circumstances of Partners for Power Imbalances among Intimate Partners

Partners are not fully equal, there tends to be a master–slave relationship between couples which is not in alignment with equal power relations for intimate partner relationship. Although, the society's expectation of power relations among intimate partners often influence acceptance of power imbalances. For example, some male partners and/or couples could do certain things for their female partners at home with no one watching but cannot do the same thing in the open because people may misconstrue it to be a weakness.

The result corroborate with the ideals of radical feminism [1]. [11] shows that partners and /or couples do desire equality in their relationships, but cultural and religious models are underdeveloped to support the achievement of such desires despite acclaimed general consensus in surveys to issues of socio-economic circumstances of partners. Inequality breeds friction and conflicts which can greatly affect the mental health and wellness of people involved, particularly among consenting adults (Bakshi, 2003). Female partners are constantly obligated to assume lower socio-economic status so as not to be perceived to be more financially buoyant than their partners. However, according to the result partners' socio-economic status does not have significant influence on power imbalances in their relationship. Howbeit this finding could be attributed to some progress on gender equality programmes including the 'woke' culture infiltrations.

Extent of Social Acceptability of Intimate Power imbalances Among Partners

It is generally believed that female partners who have good education may not be submissive to their male partners. But with the present economy, this belief is no more adhered to because without education, one may not be rightly positioned to get a decent job with good remuneration needed to support his/her family. According to the result, majority of the respondents agree that it is best for female partners to be educated and get good jobs before marriage.

In Adanikin, McGrath, Padmadas, and sexuality (2019) study of Analysis of Ethnographic Vignette Couple Data in Southwest Nigeria, social acceptability and socioeconomic circumstances of partners and/or couples deviate with the findings of this research. This difference could be influenced by prevailing culture and geographical difference of the study area. However, findings of Abama and Kwaja (2009) in Violence Against Women in Nigeria affirm that most sexual and gender-based violence in the home happens when the male partner provides everything. This therefore, justify that the possibility that a male partner who provides everything to his family will likely decide solely on what happens in the family whether it violates the rights of his partner or not exist.

Conclusion

The general goal of this study was to understand factors that intersect power imbalances in intimate partner relationship in Obio-Akpor LGA of River State. Specific objectives include; to examine the perception of power imbalances on decision making among intimate partners; assess relevance of socio-economic circumstances of partners; and examine the extent of social acceptability of power imbalances among intimate partners. There is no doubt that power imbalances are a major obstacle to achieving success in intimate partner relationships. Unequal power relations may produce intimate partner violence in relationships which may hinder progress in achieving development targets in Nigeria. Despite the growing recognition of violence as public health and human rights concern, it continues to have an unjustifiably low priority on human relationships.

In most romantic relationships, the female partner has an obligation to be private, submissive, and to embrace the idea of the second sex and these expectations further expand the question "and what about the women?" The response to this question - that women's location in, and experience of, in most situations is different from that of men in those situations was not justified in this study.

Recommendations

1. To explore decision making from a typical Nigerian home, this study found that female partners are somewhat disproportionately disadvantaged. Decision making is an integral aspect of living, which

affects every fabric of an individual's life, thus the idea of one being consulted for and not self-deciding and/or jointly making decisions becomes a problem of withheld individual agency.

By this understanding, it is essential that female partners are seen and engaged with as equal actors in the decision making process beyond mere consultations. In view of inclusion, it is recommended that all female partners including those who are not significantly literate be engaged as equal partners in decision making contrary to the report of the findings which state that enlightened and literate partners should be consulted only because they have something to offer.

2. Reverberation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 5; achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women would significantly increase opportunities for equal rights in decision making and also, act as an enabler for an individual to live free of violence and discrimination in an intimate relationship. With equal power in decision making, the right to bodily autonomy including the right to decide on spacing of and the number of children would be greatly fulfilled.
3. Accept and Sustain New Ideology: These refer to enabling circumstances that significantly encourage dearth of power imbalances among partners due to their socio-economic situations such as the 'woke culture' infiltrations including responsive gender equality programmes that support and empower both partners.
4. Increase Girls' Opportunities to Stay Longer in School; This is aimed to delay marriage age for girls (who are potential female partners) until they are able to get decent jobs. This recommendation corroborates with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goal 4 which aims to promote quality education. Target 4.4 of this goal advocates for advancement of substantial increase in the number of youth and adults with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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