# Domestic violence by women against their partners in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Victims of domestic violence are more often than not, women and children. However, studies have shown that men are also victims of violence by their spouses. The main objective of this paper is to assess the predictors of domestic violence against men in Nigeria. Data were generated from 2013 NDHS. Using SPSS version 21, bivariate and multivariate logistic regression analysis were run. The findings indicated that region, education, marital and employment status, experience of violence and alcohol consumption by the partners were found to be the significant predictors of domestic violence against men. Highly educated, divorced and separated, employed women, those whose husbands/partners drink alcohol, women who have experienced domestic violence and those who reside in North-East, North-central, South-East and South South-zones are more likely than others to perpetrate violence against their husbands/partners. Both partners should be counselled and educated about the dangers of domestic violence.

## Background

The incidence of domestic violence (DV), which includes a wide range of assaultive and coercive behaviour including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion by persons against their partners or other members of their households, has been documented by several studies (Campbell, 2010; Adebayo, 2014). The victims of domestic violence are more often than not, women and children. This explains why studies often focus on the occurrence of domestic violence in situations where women are the victims. When in 1975, Gelles and Straus, reported by Young (2014), found that women were just as likely as men to report hitting a spouse and men were just as likely as women to report getting hit, a lot of controversies were raised. Nonetheless, many other studies have shown that women are often aggressors in domestic violence (Keen, 2006; Morgan and Chadwick, 2009; Young, 2014)

Several studies have also explored factors associated with domestic violence at the macro and the micro levels both on the part of the perpetrators and the victims. At the societal level for instance, domestic violence has been associated with the patriarchal structure found in most societies (Eze-Anaba, 2007; Tenuche, 2011; Adebayo and Kolawole, 2013); and gender-insensitive criminal justice system (Adebayo and Kolawole, 2013).

At the level of the individual who is involved in domestic violence as a perpetrator, studies have shown that factors such as low education/being unskilled (Envuladu *et al.*, 2012); use of alcohol and smoking (Yusuf *et al.*, 2011; Envuladu *et al.*, 2012); and having multiple sexual partners (Envuladu *et al.*, 2012) are associated with DV. On the part of the women who suffer DV, studies have also shown that domestic violence is associated with factors such as witnessing domestic violence between one's parents (WHO, 2010; Nnadi, 2012); low education (NPC [Nigeria] and ICF Macro, 2009; Adebayo and Kolawole, 2013); use of alcohol and substance abuse (WHO, 2010; Envuladu *et al.*, 2012); having multiple sexual partners (Envuladu *et al.*, 2012); being HIV positive (Envuladu *et al.*, 2012); contributing to the family economy (Ezeah, 2013); and not having a full-time paid job or being dependent on the husband (Eze-Anaba, 2007; Adebayo *et al*, 2010; Azhar *et al.*, 2012; Adebayo and Kolawole, 2013); being in a polygynous family (Adebayo *et al.*, 2010); and justifying domestic violence (WHO, 2010). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that experiencing abuse as children is associated with domestic violence (Keen, 2006).

The 2008 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey shows that 2.2 percent of the women (15 – 49 years) interviewed had ever committed physical violence against their husbands/partners when he was not already physically beating or hurting them. The 2013 DHS shows that 1.7 percent of the age cohort reported committing physical violence against their partners. There are observable variations in the experience of domestic violence by women against their partners when different categories of variables such as experience of domestic violence as a victim, employment status, residence (i.e., urban or rural), wealth quintile, partner's use of alcohol, and spousal age difference are considered at the bivariate level. Further analysis is required to show the predictors of domestic violence by women against their partners in a multivariate test. This study seeks to fill this gap.

**Objectives**
The main objective of this paper therefore is to investigate domestic violence by women against their partners in Nigeria, specifically to assess the predictors of domestic violence against men by their partners.

**What is domestic violence?**
Definitions of domestic violence have evolved and broadened over time. It can be referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or Family Violence (FV). Family violence is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It can simply be defined as a violent confrontation between family or household members involving physical harm, sexual assault, or fear of physical harm. Morgan and Chadwick (2009) view domestic violence as acts of violence that occur within intimate relationships and take place in domestic settings. It includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse.

UK Government (2013) provides a new definition of domestic violence and abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged sixteen or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.

In their own contribution, National Domestic Violence Hotline (2015) describes domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to

gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. It can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Similarly, Creative Communications Group (2015) defines domestic violence as a behaviour used by one person in a relationship to control the other but adds that it can be criminal. According to the group, violence includes physical assault (hitting, pushing, shoving, etc.), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking. The group notes that emotional, psychological and financial abuses are not criminal behaviours but forms of abuse that can lead to criminal violence.

In view of the afore-stated, domestic violence can be described as any act or behaviour that is used to control, manipulate or cause physical harm on men by their wives or intimate partners.

**Theoretical focus**

The research hypothesis derived from the social learning theory by Bandura (1977) which posits that the behaviours people exhibit are those they have learnt from their social environments. People exhibit violent behaviour if they have been raised in social environments in which they have observed domestic violence in their parents or other authority figures with whom they identify. Observing the beating of one's mother may create in a woman the consciousness about the need to take aggression as a form of defence. This study seeks to test the hypothesis which states that irrespective of other variables, witnessing domestic violence among one's parents is a significant predictor of the occurrence of domestic violence by women against their partners.

**Data and research methods**

The data used for this analysis came from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey which is a nationally representative study of the population of Nigeria. Included in our analysis are 38,948 women within the age group of 15 to 49 years. The respondents were selected from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. The proportional stratified sampling technique was adopted. Other details about the 2013 DHS are available at the National Population Commission website (see 2013 NDHS Report). Data were analysed using SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics was adopted to analyse the characteristics of the respondents while multiple logistic regression analysis was run to test the hypothesis. Current marital status was re-coded and reduced to four categories i.e. never in union, married/living with partner, widowed and divorced/separated. Missing values or those who did not respond to the questions were excluded from the analyses.

**Findings**

**Profile of the respondents**

The 2013 DHS covered 38,948 women of 15 – 49 years. Among these women were 20.3% of 15 -19 year olds (see Table 1). This is followed by those aged 20 -24 years. More than one half of the women were between 15 and 29 years old giving a mean age of 28.86. For marital status, more than three-fifths were married while one-quarter were unmarried. Others were widowed, divorced and separated. Majority of the respondents had secondary education (37.0%) while another high proportion (35.3%) had no education. More than three-fifths of the respondents were working at the time of the survey. Similarly, three-fifth of the respondents were rural women and this may explain why majority of them had low

education. For instance, more than one half of the respondents either stopped at primary education or did not go to school at all. North West region had the highest percentage of the respondents (24.8%) followed by 17.0% and 16.0% from North East and North Central zones respectively. The rest were from the south.

**Table 1: Respondents' profile**

| Respondents' Characteristics | N = 38,948 | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| 15-19 | 7905 | 20.3 |
| 20-24 | 6714 | 17.2 |
| 25-29 | 7037 | 18.1 |
| 30-34 | 5373 | 13.8 |
| 35-39 | 4701 | 12.1 |
| 40-44 | 3663 | 9.4 |
| 45-49 | 3555 | 9.1 |
| **Marital status** | | |
| Never in union | 9820 | 25.2 |
| Married | 26403 | 67.8 |
| Living with partner | 871 | 2.2 |
| Widowed | 993 | 2.5 |
| Divorced | 432 | 1.1 |
| No longer living together/separated | 429 | 1.1 |
| **Educational level** | | |
| No education | 13740 | 35.3 |
| Primary | 7104 | 18.2 |
| Secondary | 14407 | 37.0 |
| Higher | 3697 | 9.5 |
| **Currently working** | | |
| No | 14733 | 38.0 |
| Yes | 24006 | 62.0 |
| **Place of residence** | | |
| Urban | 15545 | 39.9 |
| Rural | 23403 | 60.1 |
| **Region** | | |
| North Central | 6251 | 16.0 |
| North East | 6630 | 17.0 |
| North West | 9673 | 24.8 |
| South East | 4462 | 11.5 |
| South South | 6058 | 15.6 |
| South West | 5874 | 15.1 |

**Respondents' experience of violence by the husband/partner**
In order to assess the predictors of violent acts by women, the question on ever physically hurt husband/partner when he was not hurting the respondent was adopted as the dependent variable while respondents' socio-demographic characteristics were utilised as independent

4

variables. In addition, it was pertinent to consider if the respondents themselves had ever experienced violence by their husbands/partners. After establishing the respondents' experience of violence, two questions were asked on the severity of the violence namely whether the respondents had ever experienced less severe violence and whether they had ever experienced severe violence. For the experience of less severe violence, the respondents were asked the following questions: Ever been pushed, shook or had something thrown by husband/partner, ever been slapped by husband/partner and ever been punched with fist or hit by something harmful by husband/partner. Severe violence was defined as: Ever been kicked or dragged by husband/partner, Ever been strangled or burnt by husband/partner and Ever been threatened with knife/gun or other weapon by husband/partner. Other independent variables included in the analysis were whether the respondents' husbands/partners drank alcohol and if their fathers had ever beaten their mothers.

In Figure below, about 2.1% representing 468 of the respondents admitted that they had ever physically hurt their husbands or partners.

**Figure 1: Respondent ever physically hurt husband/partner when he was hurting her**
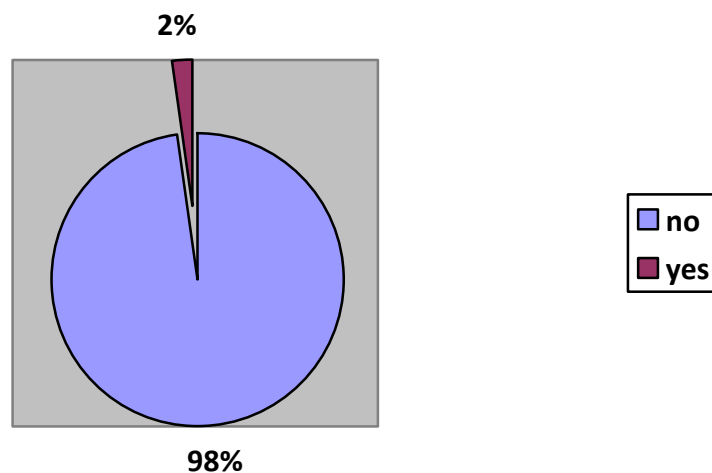


About 14.8% of the respondents admitted ever experiencing less severe violence such as being pushed, shaken or had something thrown by husband/partner, slapped, punched with fist or hit by something harmful by husband/partner (see Figure 2 below).

**Figure 2: Whether the respondent had experienced less severe violence by husband/partner**
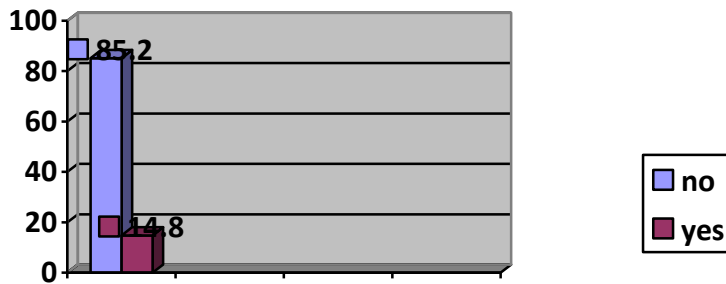
| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| □ no | 85.2 | | | |
| ■ yes | 14.8 | | | |

In the same vein, 6.1% in Figure 3 said they had experienced severe violence such as being kicked or dragged by husband/partner, strangled or burnt and threatened with knife/gun or other weapons by the husband/partner.

**Figure 3: Whether the respondent had experienced any sever violence by husband/partner**
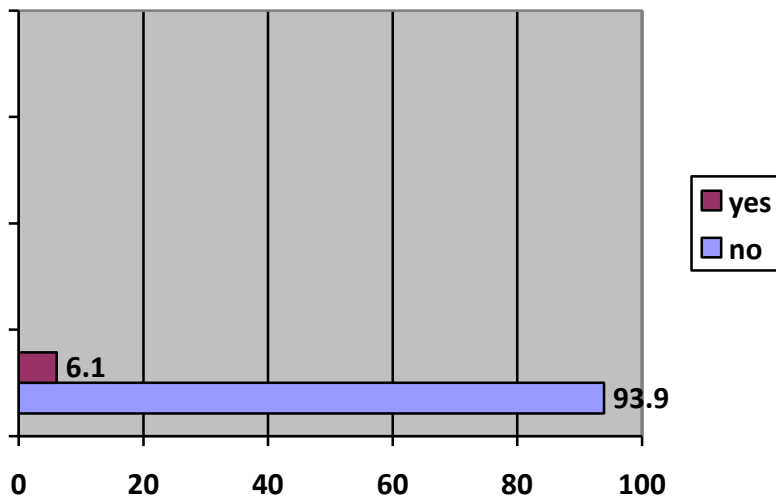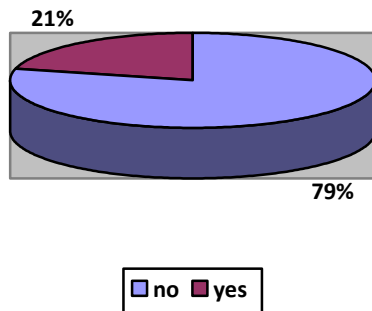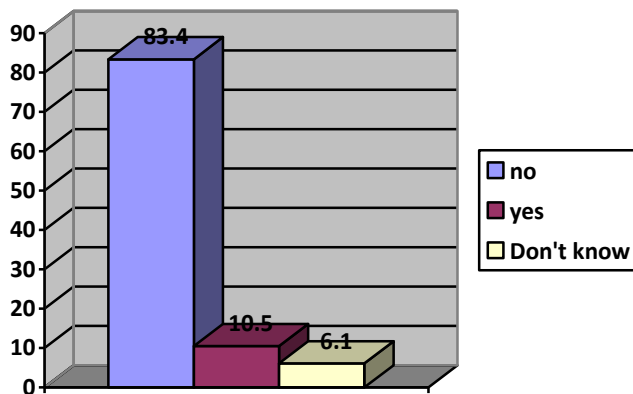
Figure 4 below shows that 21.0% of the respondents affirmed that their husbands/partners drank alcohol.

**Figure 4: Whether husband/partner drinks alcohol**



In Figure 5 below, 10.5% reported that their fathers had beaten their mothers while 6.1% could not tell whether this had happened to their mothers.

**Figure 5: Respondent's father ever beat her mother**



**The predictors of committing violence by women against their husbands/partners**

Using logistic regression analysis, the predictors of violent acts by women were examined in Table 3. The table demonstrates that location i.e. zones or regions of the country were significant predictors of women's violent acts. Women who were interviewed in North Central, North East, South East and South-South were more likely than those in South West [Reference category, (RC)] to hurt their husbands/partners physically. Their Exp Bs were significant at $p<0.05$, $p<0.001$, $p<0.001$ and $p<0.001$ respectively. They are all greater than 1.000 and fall between the lower and upper confidence intervals and therefore it could be said that they are true for the whole population. Women in the North East are eight times more

likely than women in the South West to commit violence against their spouses. Likewise, South Eastern women are twice likely to hurt their husbands/partners.

**Table 3: Logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of committing violence by women against their husbands/partners**

| | Exp(B) | 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) for EXP (B) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Lower | Upper |
| **Age in 5-year groups** | | | |
| 15-19 | 0.771 | 0.432 | 1.377 |
| 20-24 | 0.728 | 0.481 | 1.100 |
| 25-29 | 0.717 | 0.498 | 1.033 |
| 30-34 | 0.884 | 0.617 | 1.267 |
| 35-39 | 0.823 | 0.568 | 1.193 |
| 40-44 | 0.827 | 0.556 | 1.231 |
| 45-49 [Reference category (RC)] | 1.000 | | |
| **Region** | | | |
| North Central | 1.621* | 1.049 | 2.504 |
| North East | 8.029** | 5.410 | 11.917 |
| North West | 0.699 | 0.356 | 1.371 |
| South East | 2.157*** | 1.414 | 3.290 |
| South South | 1.932*** | 1.303 | 2.865 |
| South West (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Type of place of residence** | | | |
| Urban | 1.085 | 0.855 | 1.377 |
| Rural (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Highest educational level** | | | |
| No education | 0.505** | 0.329 | 0.775 |
| Primary | 0.676 | 0.452 | 1.009 |
| Secondary | 0.754 | 0.511 | 1.113 |
| Higher (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Current marital status** | | | |
| married/living with partner | 0.537*** | 0.382 | 0.755 |
| widowed | 0.567 | 0.319 | 1.006 |
| divorced/separated (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Respondent currently working -** | | | |
| No | 0.738* | 0.565 | 0.965 |
| Yes (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Experienced any less severe violence by husband/partner** | | | |
| No | 0.093*** | 0.072 | 0.120 |
| Yes (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Experienced any severe violence by husband/partner** | | | |
| No | 0.774* | 0.608 | 0.986 |
| Yes (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Husband/partner drinks alcohol** | | | |
| No | 0.437*** | 0.348 | 0.550 |
| Yes (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Respondent's father ever beat her mother** | | | |
| No | 0.750 | 0.532 | 1.057 |
| Yes | 1.313 | 0.909 | 1.895 |
| Don't know (RC) | 1.000 | | |
| **Constant** | 0.291 | | |

*P<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

8

The logistic regression analysis shows that education is a predictor of women's violent acts. The Exp B (0.505) of no education is significant (p<0.05) indicating that illiterate women are less likely than higher educated women to cause harm on their husbands/partners. Again, the finding could be generalised because the Exp B lies between the lower and upper confidence intervals (CI).

In Table 3, the Exp B for married respondents was 0.537 which is less than 1 and it is also highly significant (p<0.001). This means that married women are less likely than divorced and separated women to physically hurt their partners. Women who were divorced and those separated from their partners were used as reference category i.e. the Exp B is 1.000. Furthermore, the Exp B for married respondents is between the lower and upper confidence intervals (CI) indicating that the finding could be generalized to the whole population of the survey.

For those who were not working at the time of the study, the Exp B is 0.738 and significant (p<0.5). This is less than 1.000 and therefore unemployed women are less likely to commit violence against their spouses in other words, employed women could inflict harm on their husbands/partners.

The Exp B of the respondents who said they had not experienced any less severe violence by their husbands/partners is 0.093 and highly significant (p<0.001). The Exp B lies in between lower (0.072) and upper (0.120) confidence intervals. This implies that those who said they had experienced less severe violence which is the RC are more likely than others to physically hurt their partners. Once again, it is true for the whole population. Similarly, those who had experienced severe violence from their partners are more likely to hurt their partners physically. The Exp B for those who had experienced severe violence is 0.774 which is less 1.000 of the RC (those who had experienced severe violence) and is significant (p<0.05). The Exp B also falls within the lower and upper CI.

Table 3 further shows that the Exp B (0.437) of those whose husbands were not drinking alcohol is significant (p<0.001) and less than that of reference category (those whose husbands were drinking alcohol) and therefore respondents whose partners drank alcohol are more likely to inflict harm physically on their partners.

From Table 3, it was demonstrated that age, type of place of residence and witnessing violence in one's parental home were not predictors of physical violence by women. The hypothesis that witnessing violence is a perfect predictor of violence is not validated by this analysis. The variable, respondent's father ever beat her mother was used to test the hypothesis which states that witnessing domestic violence among one's parents is a significant predictor of the occurrence of domestic violence by women against their partners. The hypothesis was refuted because its Exp B (1.313) was not significant.

**Discussion of results**
The survey revealed that location where the respondents were interviewed was a significant predictor of violence by women. Women from the south east were found to be twice likely than south western women to inflict bodily harm on their partners. Similarly, women from the south-south zone were more likely than those from south west to do the same. Both findings were highly significant at p<0.001. It could be that women from these two zones hit their husbands in self defence or as a result of accumulated anger from previous experiences of

violence by their husbands or that they were physically aggressive more than the women from the south-west region. They could have committed the acts out of anger based on their temperament.

Secondly, those who were interviewed in the north-west and north-east were more likely to be violent than those from South West. This is surprising because women from the northern part of Nigeria are supposed to be controlled by their men. It is actually difficult to explain why they were the ones to cause bodily harm on their partners more than other women from the South west zone. Perhaps, they physically abused their husbands out of jealousy as many of them would have been in polygynous marriages according to their religious injunction as most of them would have come from Islamic homes. Besides religious injunction, polygynous marriage still predominates in the north.

The data indicated that highly educated women were more likely than uneducated ones to commit violence against their husbands/partners. Highly educated women are likely to be empowered both economically and socially. They are more independent than uneducated women and therefore could afford to fight their partners without minding the consequences. On the contrary, low educated women suffer domestic violence more than women with higher level of education (Envuladu *et al.*, 2012).

Marital status was found to be a predictor of inflicting physical hurt on the respondents' husbands or partners. It was revealed that divorced and separated women were more likely than married respondents to physically hurt their partners. This, perhaps, could be one of the reasons for their divorce and separation. The implication is that hurting men physically could also lead to instability in marriage and the children will bear the brunt and could lead them to delinquency. Studies have shown that children from broken homes are more likely than children from intact families to be delinquent (Farring, no date; Ngale, 2009; Sanni *et al*, 2010; Ugwuoke and Duruji, 2015; Animasahun and Aremu, 2015).

The survey further revealed that women who were working were perpetrators of violence against their partners. The explanation of this finding is similar to the one above where educated women were more likely than others to inflict harm on their partners. Employed women are more likely to be economically empowered and could capitalise on it to perpetrate such acts. Most women are bread winners in their homes currently and there seems to be a reversal of roles between men and their wives since the economic recession. A female household head could disrespect her husband/partner and/or the husband could feel threatened and in order to assert himself in the family, would provoke his wife who could, out of anger and stress, hit him.

The study also found that respondents who had experienced both less severe and severe violence had inflicted harm on their husbands/partners. This group of women would have endured and tolerated violence from their partners and then decided to retaliate even though their husbands/partners were not hurting them at the time they committed the violence. The implication here is that the women may have learnt how to commit physical hurt from their husbands/partners as postulated by the social learning theory.

It was revealed in the study that those whose partners drank alcohol also perpetrated violence against their husbands/partners. This could be as a result of husbands' misbehaviour after drinking or that the respondents perceived drinking as a waist of financial resources which

could have been used to solve other competitive needs. Women usually get angry when their partners engage in drinking excessive alcohol.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The research hypothesis which stated that witnessing domestic violence among one's parents was a significant predictor of the occurrence of domestic violence by women against their partners. This hypothesis was not validated by this study but rather other predictors were found. These predictors include region, education, marital status, employment status, experience of violence and taking of alcohol. The findings indicated that women in the north-central, north-east, south-east and south-south, highly educated women, divorced/separated women, employed women, those whose husbands/partners drank alcohol and those women who had experienced domestic violence were likely to perpetrate violence against their husbands/partners.

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

♦ Both male and female partners should be counselled and educated about the dangers of domestic violence.

♦ There is also the need to encourage men to speak out or report such cases of violent acts on them.

♦ Behaviour change communication can be used on the women who batter their partners in order to change them.

♦ Domestic violence against men is not common; may be because it is not reported or because generally, women are assumed to be on the receiving end. People do not talk about it therefore men tend to suffer in silence. There is need to organize media and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the phenomenon.

♦ Intervention programmes and policies should be formulated to protect this group of vulnerable men. Men should also be included in the battered women's programmes.

♦ Further research studies should be conducted on the magnitude, patterns and risk factors associated with violence against men.

♦ More studies on male victims of domestic violence should be conducted to assess the profile of the men being battered.

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