

## ARTICLE

# Violence against Women: Awareness, Knowledge and Attitudes of Male Civil Servants at the Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri, Nigeria.

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**Abstract:** *Background:* Violence against women (VAW) remains a huge and protracted public health concern. Also, there is growing recognition that the role men play in changing these inequalities in gender based power relations is critical. Documenting the trends of the aforesaid role is essential to developing public health interventions to tackle VAW. *Objective:* To determine the awareness, knowledge and attitudes to VAW among male civil servants at the state and federal government ministries and agencies (MDAs) in Owerri, Nigeria. *Materials and methods:* This was a cross sectional survey of 326 male civil servants at the State and Federal Government MDAs in Owerri Nigeria, selected using multistage sampling technique from August 2016 to January 2017. Data were collected using pretested self-administered semi-structured questionnaires. Data were analysed using SPSS V.22. Statistical associations between variables were tested using Chi square, at  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ . *Results:* The mean age of respondents was  $40.6 \pm 9.8$ . Three hundred and two (92.6%) of them were aware of VAW. Sources of information on VAW include: 184(57.9%) television, 171(53.8%) radio, 167(52.5%) print media, 152(47.8%) social media. The form of VAW mostly cited 227(70.7%) was rape, while the mostly practiced form of VAW 201(62.4%) was physical violence. Only 65 (20%) had good knowledge, while 151 (46.3%) had a good attitude towards VAW. There were statistically significant associations between respondent's attitudes towards VAW and (religion [ $p = 0.000$ ], tribe [ $p = 0.017$ ]). *Conclusions:* This study revealed high awareness on VAW, poor knowledge about VAW and poor attitude towards the practice of VAW. We recommend sustained awareness and improved comprehensive gender equity cum attitudinal change education.

**Keywords:** Violence against women, knowledge, attitude, male civil servants, Owerri Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women (VAW) has been defined as any act of gender-based violence (*i.e. primarily or exclusively committed against women*) that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, occurring in all settings- public or private, including work places, schools, families, and communities (*United Nations, 2006; United Nations, 1994*). The term "women" here, refers to females of all ages, as VAW can occur even before a girl child is born through sex selective abortion and menace facing them all through old age when they could be termed witches (*United Nations, 2006; WHO, 2017*). Also, this definition refers to four types of violence - psychological and physical assaults, and violence related to action



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and deprivation. (*United Nations, 2006*).

It comprises a whole gamut of abuses perpetrated against women that arise from gender biases and women's subordinate status in a society relative to men (*Available at: <http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/partners-inasia/partners-in-pakistan/sdts/sdts-updates/3486-sdts-menagainst-vaw.html>*). Various acts denying women some basic privileges availed their male folks, treating women as inferior to men and such forms of gender driven discrimination against women include: the denial of right to ownership of property or holding of traditional titles, promissory marriages, female genital mutilation, harmful or negative widowhood practices (*Odimegwu & Okemgbo, 2003*), gender bullying and issues with subjugation to wife's limelight, famous identities or bigger career personality.

Violence against women is a global burden, regarded internationally as a human rights violation issue. At least one third of women globally has suffered from lifetime abuse. The abuser is usually someone known to them (*United Nations, 1994*). The 2008 Nigerian National Demographic and Health Survey (*NDHS*) showed that more than 30.5% of married women have experienced at least one or more forms of physical, emotional or sexual violence in their marriage (*NPC and ICF Macro, 2008*).

Violence against women cuts across socio-demographics, as well as socio-economic and geographic boundaries, affecting all societies (*Available at: [www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/women-s-rights/violence-against-women/violence-against-women-information/](http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/women-s-rights/violence-against-women/violence-against-women-information/)*). It is deeply rooted in culture and religion; supported and in many cases, even institutionalized by patriarchal societies (*OECD, 2013*). In Italy, the Roman law bestows on men the right to chastise their wives even to the point of death. The same law condones burning of witches, an act that has the backing of the State and some churches in some areas around the globe (*Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/kued/nosafeplace/script/script.html>*). In Nigeria, there is no State law in support of VAW, but societal structures predicated on some ideological, cultural and religious constructs abound, that lead to the justification of domestic violence (*Kritz & Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1999*). In Ibo communities, the family authority is structured such that women are subordinates to their male folks (*Kritz & Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1999*). In Hausa communities, it is believed that Allah made the man superior to the woman, therefore men often lord it

over women in such domestic issues as conflict resolution, decision making, as well as impinge on their autonomy (*Kritz & Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1999; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abaniher, 2005*). Those of Yoruba tribe perceive violence against a wife as a tool that a husband uses to chastise his wife and to improve her (*Oyediran & Isiugo-Abaniher, 2005*).

A study in Bayelsa state, Nigeria, revealed that majority of the respondents have not heard about VAW. However, these respondents knew the examples of VAW (*Adika et al., 2013*). The attitude of men towards VAW is shaped by both the perpetration of VAW and the responses to this violence by the victim and others around her (*Flood & Pease, 2009*). The perceptions of VAW vary with region, religion, and class (*Oyediran & Isiugo-Abaniher, 2005*). For example, common acceptable reasons for beatings among men are lack of respect for husband's stubbornness, imposition of will on husband, and failure of wifely duties (*Ogunjuyigbe et al., 2005*). Men have been reported to be more empathetic to agony of the discrimination and valued individual rights of the women (*Rafi et al., 2003*).

The fifth of the sustainable development goals aims at promoting gender equality and empowering all women (*Chaudhuri, 2015*). This takes into cognizance that 'providing women with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. In developed climes, effective measures have been put in place to contain this trend (*Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence\\_against\\_women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence_against_women)*). However, in developing countries including Nigeria, not much has been done in protecting the women against domestic violence.

There is dearth of data-based in-depth research undertaken on VAW from males' perspectives. Most of the existing researches conducted were VAW from female respondents' angle. The findings of this work will help generate new knowledge on VAW and thus bridge knowledge gap on VAW especially among males. It will also help in improving the attitudes of males to VAW, identifying further areas of research on VAW and deriving more effective evidence based policies and actions for addressing VAW. To gauge the current situation, trends, and changes, the index study was designed to determine the awareness, knowledge and attitude to VAW among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government MDAs in Owerri, Nigeria.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Study design:** A cross sectional descriptive study on the awareness, knowledge and attitudes to VAW among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government MDAs in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria, was conducted from August 2016 to January 2017.

**Study setting:** Owerri is the capital of Imo State in Nigeria. It is made up of three local government areas, thus: Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West. The estimated population of Owerri as of 2006 census is 401,873 which is 10.3% of Imo State population (Available at: @ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owerri>). It is approximately 100 square kilometers in area (Available at: @ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owerri>). The residents of Owerri are predominantly Christians, while the main occupation is civil service. The estimated population of male civil servants in Owerri is 3,582 (State Civil Service Commission, 2016). Data were collected using pre-tested, self-administered, semi-structured questionnaires designed from relevant literature.

**Study participants:** This comprised all male civil servants working in the State and Federal Government MDAs in Owerri, Imo State. Eligible respondents were male civil servants who have been working in the selected State and Federal Government MDAs in Owerri, Imo State for at least one year prior to the study. Male civil servants who declined consent and were not willing to participate in the study, and those who were absent from work at the time of study.

**Variables:** Dependent variable – Domestic violence. The independent variables comprise: a) sociodemographic, used to collect data such as respondents' age, marital status; religion, tribe; highest educational status attained etc.; b) awareness cum knowledge of VAW; c) attitudes towards VAW and d) factors affecting knowledge and attitudes to VAW.

**Data sources/measurement:** Frequencies of the variables were assessed using univariate analysis, while bivariate analysis using chi-square test was employed in identifying associations between sociodemographic variables and knowledge cum attitudes to VAW.

**Bias:** Reporting bias could result from the sensitive nature of the questions. This we overcame by using anonymous questionnaires and ensuring the respondents that their answers would be strictly confidential and

specifically for research purposes.

**Sample size estimation:** Using the formula for population less than 10,000, Minimum sample size calculated ( $nf$ ) =  $n / (1+n/N)$  (Araoye, 2008). where  $n=323$ ; and the estimated population size  $N = 3,582$  (19),  $nf=296.28$ . Approximately 296 male civil servants. With the attrition ratio of 10%=  $29.628 \approx 326$ . Therefore, the final minimum sample size is 326.

**Sampling technique:** The Multistage sampling technique was used to select study respondents. Stage 1: Based on level of government's jurisdiction, stratified sampling technique was used to group the respondents' MDAs into; Federal, State and Local. Stage 2: Using simple random sampling technique by balloting, Federal and State MDAs were chosen. Stage 3: The MDAs studied were selected per level using simple random sampling technique by balloting. Stage 4: Subject selection was done via simple random sampling technique, by balloting, with the staff list, adjusted for males only as the sampling frame. This is done until the number allotted to each selected MDA is attained putting our inclusion and exclusion criteria into consideration.

**Statistical methods:** Descriptive and analytical statistics of the data were carried out using SPSS v.22.0. Data were presented in frequency, summary indices and tables where appropriate, while bivariate analysis using chi-square and Fishers exact tests determined associations between different socio-demographic variables in relation to knowledge and attitudes to VAW among male civil servants. Level of significance was set at 5% or less.

**Ethical consideration:** The study has been examined and approved by the University Teaching Hospital Ethics Committee through the Head Department of Community Medicine, Madonna University Elele Rivers State Permission was obtained from relevant authorities in the establishments studied. A written informed consent was obtained from each participant for the conduct and publication of this research study and assurance of confidentiality given. Study participants were free to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. All authors hereby declare that the study has therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

## RESULTS

Three hundred and twenty-six questionnaires were distributed in this survey. All of these were properly filled analysed giving a response rate of 100%. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

**TABLE 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Characteristics	Frequency N = 326 (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>	
≤ 30	53 (16.4)
31 - 40	111 (37.1)
41 - 50	89 (27.4)
51 - 60	62 (19.1)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Never Married	69 (21.3)
Currently Married	239 (73.8)
Cohabiting but not married	6 (1.9)
Widowed	5 (1.5)
Separated/Divorced	5 (1.5)
<b>Religion</b>	
Roman Catholic	221 (67.8)
Pentecostal	66 (20.2)
Anglican	29 (8.9)
Orthodox	4 (1.2)
Muslim	5 (1.5)
Atheist	1 (0.3)
<b>Tribe</b>	
Hausa	6 (1.8)
Ibo	293 (89.9)
Yoruba	11 (3.3)
Others*	14 (4.3)
<b>Educational status</b>	
Primary	7 (2.2)
Secondary	24 (7.4)
Tertiary	292 (90.4)
<b>Number of female children</b>	
None	133 (41.6)
One	94 (29.4)
Two or more	93 (29)

\*Efik, Tiv, Gwari, Ijaw. Itsekiri.

Table 2 highlights the awareness and knowledge of violence against women among respondents.

**TABLE 2.** Awareness and Knowledge of Violence against Women among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Characteristics	Frequency N = 326 (%)
<b>Have you heard of VAW?</b>	
Yes	302 (92.6)
No	24 (7.4)
<b>Source of Information on VAW*</b>	
Television	184 (57.9)
Radio	171 (53.8)
Print media	167 (52.5)
Social media	152 (47.8)
Discussions	120 (37.7)
Seminars	74 (23.3)
Religious forum	13 (4.1)
<b>Forms of VAW you know*</b>	
Rape	227 (70.7)
Wife battering	194 (60.4)
Verbal abuse	144 (44.9)
Female Genital Mutilation	141 (43.9)
Child Marriage	135 (42.1)
Forced Abortion	127 (39.7)
Denying Female Education	122 (38)
Incest	65 (20.2)
<b>VAW common in the study area*</b>	
Physical Violence	201 (62.4)
Sexual Violence	140 (43.5)
Emotional Violence	67 (20.8)
Mental Violence	13 (4)

\* Multiple responses apply

Table 3 shows attitudes towards violence against women among respondents.

Table 4 shows the overall scores for knowledge and attitudes to violence against women among respondents. Table 5 summarizes the association between sociodemographic determinants of knowledge of violence against women among respondents. Table 6 summarizes the association between sociodemographic determinants of attitudes to violence against women among respondents.

**TABLE 3.** Attitudes towards Violence against Women among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Characteristics	Frequency N = 326 (%)
<b>Is violence against women a violation of human rights?</b>	
Yes	285 (89.1)
No	35(10.9)
<b>Should violence against women be properly addressed in the society?</b>	
Yes	58 (18.1)
No	262 (81.9)
<b>Should there be preference of men to women with the same qualifications in the work place, leadership and other positions?</b>	
Yes	200 (63.5)
No	115 (36.5)
<b>Should women engage in work and occupations?</b>	
Yes	304 (94.4)
No	18 (5.6)
<b>Do you support girl child marriage?</b>	
Yes	17 (5.2)
No	307 (94.8)
<b>Is it proper for a man to beat up his wife?</b>	
Yes	11 (3.4)
No	310 (96.6)
<b>Should a woman inherit landed property?</b>	
Yes	202 (64.3)
No	112 (35.7)
<b>Should women's opinion on issues in the family be respected?</b>	
Yes	227 (70)
No	8 (2.5)
Sometimes	89 (27.5)
<b>Should the female child have the same liberty as the male child?</b>	
Yes	202 (62.5)
No	121(37.5)
<b>Is the abuse of women in public or private an act of violence?</b>	
Yes	202 (62.5)
No	121 (37.5)
<b>Is it proper for a wife to earn more than the husband?</b>	
Yes	51 (15.7)
No	273 (84.3)
<b>Have you been involved in any form of violence against women?</b>	
Yes	43 (13.4)
No	279 (86.6)

**TABLE 4.** Overall Scores for Knowledge and Attitudes to Violence against Women among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Overall Scores for Knowledge of Violence against Women		Overall Scores for Attitudes to Violence against Women	
Variable	Frequency N = 326 (%)	Variable	Frequency N = 326 (%)
Poor 0 -3	185 (56.7)	Poor 0 -6	31 (9.5)
Fair 4 - 6	76 (23.3)	Fair 7 - 9	144 (44.2)
Good 7 - 8	65 (20)	Good 10 - 12	151 (46.3)
Total	326 (100)	Total	326 (100)

**TABLE 5.** Sociodemographic determinants of Knowledge of Violence against Women among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Variables	Knowledge of VAW			Test statistics $\chi^2$
	Poor (0-3) Frequency (%)	Fair (4-6) Frequency (%)	Good (7-8) Frequency (%)	
<b>Age</b>				
≤ 30	31 (63.3)	11 (22.4)	7 (14.3)	$\chi^2 = 2.555$ df=6 $p = 0.86$
31 - 40	58 (52.3)	30 (27)	23 (20.7)	
41 - 50	47 (57.3)	18 (22)	17 (20.7)	
51 - 60	31 (54.4)	16 (28.1)	10 (17.5)	
<b>Religion</b>				
Roman Catholic	126 (57)	49 (22.2)	46 (20.8)	Fishers exact =3.406, df=10 $p = 0.970$
Pentecostal	36 (54.5)	17 (25.8)	13 (19.7)	
Anglican	15 (51.7)	9 (31)	5 (17.2)	
Orthodox	3 (75)	0 (0)	1 (25)	
Muslin	3 (60)	0 (0)	1 (25)	
Atheist	1 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	
<b>Tribe</b>				
Hausa	3 (50)	1 (16.7)	2 (33.3)	Fishers exact =6.426, df=6 $p = 0.377$
Ibo	170 (57)	72 (24.2)	56 (18.8)	
Yoruba	6 (54.5)	3 (27.3)	2 (18.2)	
Others	7 (50)	1 (7.1)	8 (42.9)	
<b>Educational status</b>				
Primary	5 (71.4)	2 (28.6)	0 (0)	Fishers exact =2.232, df=4 $p = 0.693$
Secondary	15 (62.5)	5 (20.8)	4 (16.7)	
Tertiary	163 (55.8)	68 (23.3)	61 (20.9)	

**TABLE 6.** Sociodemographic determinants of Attitudes to Violence against Women among male civil servants at the State and Federal Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Owerri Nigeria from August 2016 to January 2017.

Variables	Knowledge of VAW			Test statistics $\chi^2$
	Poor (0-3) Frequency (%)	Fair (4-6) Frequency (%)	Good (7-8) Frequency (%)	
<b>Age</b>				
≤ 30	3 (6.1)	21 (42.9)	25 (51)	Fishers exact =6.519, df=6 $p=0.368$
31 – 40	12 (10.8)	56 (50.5)	43 (38.7)	
41 – 50	7 (8.5)	37 (45.1)	38 (46.3)	
51 – 60	8 (14)	19 (33.4)	30 (52.6)	
<b>Religion</b>				
Catholic	18 (8.1)	97 (43.9)	106 (48)	Fishers exact =34,904, df=10 $p=0.000$
Pentecostal	9 (13.6)	30 (45.5)	27 (40.9)	
Anglican	1 (3.4)	12 (41.4)	16 (55.2)	
Muslin	4 (8)	0 (0)	1 (20)	
Orthodox	0 (0)	3 (75)	1 (25)	
Atheist	0 (0)	1 (100)	0 (0)	
<b>Tribe</b>				
Hausa	3 (50)	1 (16.7)	2 (33.3)	Fishers exact =15,427, df=6 $p=0.017$
Ibo	26 (8.7)	136 (45.6)	136 (45.6)	
Yoruba	1 (9.1)	2 (18.2)	8 (72.7)	
Others	2 (14.3)	6 (42.9)	2 (42.9)	
<b>Educational status</b>				
Primary	1 (14.3)	4 (57.1)	2 (28.6)	Fishers exact =1.197, df=4 $p=0.879$
Secondary	3 (12.5)	11 (45.8)	10 (41.7)	
Tertiary	128 (9.6)	128 (43.8)	136 (46.6)	

## DISCUSSION

The mean age of these participants was about forty years, indicating that most of them were either married or are mature enough to give informed responses to the study questions. This was corroborated by the finding that more than seventy percent of them were married at the time of the study.

The findings of the current study, showed that more than ninety percent of participants were aware of VAW. The modal source of information on VAW reported by about six in every ten participants studied, was television, then radio, print media, social media. This report contrasts with that

of participants in a study of men's attitude and knowledge towards VAW by Adika et al., (2013) at Amarata community, Bayelsa state, Nigeria in 2013. The reference study stated that majority of the participants had a relatively low level of awareness (40%) about VAW (Adika et al., 2013). This report could be explained by the urban study setting where the index study was conducted, with high public awareness through television, radio, newspapers, social media as well as the level of education and the perceived civility, compared to the rural setting in Amarata community. The Safe World Field Partners [SWFP] (<http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/partners-in-asia/partners-in-pakistan/sdts/sdts->

[updates/3486-sdts-menagainst-vaw.html](#)) concurred that males demonstrate their masculine dominant role and supremacy over their female folks with especially the rural women facing all types of violation in their life. This underscores the pole position of the application of local media of information dissemination such as town criers, town hall meetings, community leaders, etc.

From the result of our study, the forms of VAW mostly cited (*by 75% of participants*), was rape, then wife battering, verbal abuse, while the form of VAW most common in the study area was physical violence. These findings of the current study are consistent with earlier findings from United Nations in-depth study on all forms of VAW (*United Nations, 2006*). This should go beyond figures to putting human faces on them as in VAW wives, mothers, grannies, sisters and daughters are raped, battered, verbally abused, neglected beyond reasons, utterly deprived of their dignity and basic needs. Beyond these, more worrisome is the fact that the cost of this man-made problem is multi-dimensional thus justifies measures geared towards its amelioration

Attitude refers to beliefs and feelings about a person or event and the resulting support or opposition to those (*Rafi et al., 2003*). The findings of the current research revealed variations in the attitudes towards VAW among participants. From our results; about nine out of ten participants view VAW as a violation of human rights, about eight out of ten participants reported issues of VAW as not properly addressed in the society, more than sixty percent of participants supported preference of men to women in leadership positions even when qualifications are same, while (94.4%) opined that women engage in work and occupations. The 2013 study done in Yenagoa showed that only 20% of the men preferred females to hold leadership position (*Adika et al., 2013*). From this result, there is still a negative attitude towards women. The result of this study is consistent with earlier research findings from Bangladesh and elsewhere (*Rafi et al., 2003; Naved et al., 2011*). Other attitudes towards VAW among participants include: support for: girl child marriage; wife battering; non-inheritance of landed property by women; non-respect to woman's opinion in her family. These findings are in keeping with the findings of several studies (*Odimegwu & Okemgbo, 2003; Rafi et al., 2003; Naved et al., 2011*). These act as obstacles hindering the rights of women to participate fully in society, with attendant drawbacks on national development.

The findings of the current study show that only two in ten and nearly fifty percent of participants had good knowledge and good attitude towards VAW respectively. The findings of the current study revealed there were no association between participant's knowledge of VAW and the sociodemographic variables such as age, religion, tribe, and highest educational status attained. However, there were statistically significant associations between participant's attitudes towards VAW and sociodemographic variables such as religion and tribe. This is consistent with findings that VAW is deeply rooted in many cultural and traditional values (*OECD, 2013; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abaniher, 2005; Flood & Pease, 2009*). A consistent finding in attitudinal research is that being male or female is a significant predictor of attitudes toward VAW (*Bontha & Shauntanu, 2009*).

This study relied on self-reporting of sociodemographic and other data, a method that could be prone reporting errors. Information provided by respondents might be influenced by recall and social desirability bias due to its sensitive nature and cultural barrier. However, participants were given enough time to reflect and think through a sequence of events in their life before answering. This study did not include women to gauge their partners' responses towards VAW on quantitative study. This could form the basis for further studies. A major strength of this work is the response rate of 100% achieved.

## CONCLUSION

This study revealed high awareness on VAW, poor knowledge about VAW and poor attitude towards the practice of VAW. We recommend sustained awareness and improved comprehensive gender equity cum attitudinal change education.

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