

PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF MARITAL RAPE AS EXPRESSED BY MARRIED ADULTS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR MARITAL COUNSELLING PRACTICE

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Abstract

Marital rape is a pervasive issue and yet remains underreported form of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. This study however, investigated psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by married adults in Nigeria. The study was a descriptive survey type, using multi-stage sampling technique which involves; purposive, stratified and random sampling to select 1,614 respondents to participate in the study from a population of 71, 628,812 out of which 1,555 questionnaires were finally valid for the study. Instrument tagged “Psychosocial Consequences of Marital Rape Questionnaire (PCMRQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument satisfied face validity and yielded a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.88. The data collected for the study were analysed using percentage, mean, and standard deviation, rank order, and multi-variance analysis of covariance. The hypothesis formulated for the study was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed among others that the psychosocial consequences of marital rape among married adults in Nigeria are; strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness by the wife; avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (hypoactive sexual desire disorder); painful sexual intercourse (dyspareunia); loss of trust or feeling of being betrayed; intermittent headache among others were most identified consequences of marital rape. There were no significant differences in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape among married adults in Nigeria based on gender and religion, but significant differences were reported based on age and length of years in marriage of the respondents. However, based on the findings of this study, some recommendations were made such as; marital counsellors should focus more on the feelings and emotions of married women, and that the husbands should be encouraged to engage their wives’ consents and be ensured that such is given before having sexual affairs with them, among others.

Keywords: Marital Rape, Psychosocial Consequences, Married Adults, Nigeria

Introduction

Rape has been recognized all over the world as a criminally conceived act against humanity and dignity of women folk in most cases. Although, it ravaging effect has escalated to both gender nowadays, the phenomenon still persists on female gender with its attendant consequences on their psychological and social well-beings. Ajah, et al (2022) defined rape as when a penile device is inserted into a victim's vagina, anus or mouth without the victim's consent been sought for, and is given. Section 282-285 of the Nigerian Penal Code, which applies to the Northern States, also viewed rape as follows: A male is considered to have committed rape if, he engages in sexual relations with a woman under any of the following circumstances which include against her will; without her consent; with her consent, provided that consent was acquired by instilling a fear of injury or death in her;

when the man is aware that she is, or believes she is, legally married to another man, she will consent to the relationship; when she is under fourteen years old or mentally incompetent, with or without her consent.

According to Kolade-Faseyi (2018), some jurisdictions still uphold the traditional views as being propounded by Hale (1736), to put forward some argument for the exemption of spousal rape as criminal offence. It is an undisputable fact that that establishing rape within marriage is usually an uphill task, as it is believed that such allegation can foreclose any form of reconciliation that may be anticipated between the spouses and thus, escalating the rate of divorce among couples which could be more detrimental to the society. It is the contention of these proponents that, any rule which may prevent the likelihood of reconciliation may not work, thus no need to stress up oneself for its implementation in the first place (Umoren, 2023). In addition to this, the view also held that a spiteful wife may resort to allegations of rape to threaten her husband when “chips are down”.

The Nigeria judicial system on rape seems to be unsympathetic to the victim of rape with strict requirement for corroboration evidence and proof and does not consider report of force sex by a spouse to be rape. Lamido (2021) posited that it is a general rule of law that the court should not convict accuse person of any offense without corroborations, thereby making it difficult for victims to prove cases. Adherence to this probably makes conviction impossible and non-consideration of coerced sex by a husband on his wife as rape. Olatunji (2012) earlier, maintained that to effect conviction in rape case, the Nigeria law requires that penetration must be proved; the victim must be independently corroborated. Corroboration in practice of law according to Olatunji (2012) implies validation of existing evidence coming from another independent witness(s). The corroboration according to law must be from at least a credible witness. If the judge or jury is satisfied with this witness beyond doubt, conviction will be effected. On the other hand, if the defendant or accused lawyer presents a superior argument, the interest of the accused would be protected and the victim will be left to her faith. In actual sense, sex is often carryout in an obscure environment, getting someone to testify its occurrence is a difficult task.

In African context, marital rape is less recognized and sanctioned. It could have severe and long-lasting effect if there is less attention, care and justice on the part of the victim. One of the most evident consequences is Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD). Research works have ample of evidence that the experience of marital rape comes along with a number of troubling experiences such as, physical health problems, including chronic pain and gastrointestinal problems, sleep disturbance, including insomnia and nightmares, emotional problems such as feeling of disconnected from one’s partner among other consequences.

Esere, Idowu, Durosaro and Omotosho (2009) discovered in their study conducted on the causes and consequences of intimate partner rape and violence as reported by selected married women in Nigeria, and their findings revealed astounding facts that the principal causes of intimate partner rape include; unequal power relations, alcohol and drug dependence and jealousy. They also reported that self-reported consequences of intimate partner rape by victims included among other consequences include; physical injury (31.87%), constant headaches (27.27%), sleep disturbances (18.18%), excessive fear and anxiety (9.09%), suicidal ideation (9.09%) and hatred for men (4.55%). These findings confirm that intimate partner rape may play a significant or salient role in the poor state of health reported by most of the Nigerian women. Accordingly, effective intervention strategies at all levels are needed to address it.

Statement of the Problem

Marital rape, also known as spousal or intimate partner rape, remains a significant problem and yet, an underreported issue in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. Despite the increasing awareness of gender-based violence, marital rape is often overlooked or normalized within the confines of marriage, where traditional cultural beliefs and societal norms prioritize marital unity and male authority. In Nigeria, the legal framework surrounding marital rape is either ambiguous or non-existent in many regions, which contributes to the persistence of this form of abuse. The psychosocial consequences of marital rape are profound, affecting both the victims and perpetrators in various detrimental ways. Victims, often women, may experience a wide range of emotional, psychological, and social repercussions, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), low self-esteem, social isolation, and a disrupted sense of safety within the marriage. In some cases, the trauma can extend to physical health issues, such as sexual dysfunction and other reproductive health problems. The impact on children in households where marital rape occurs can also be significant, as they may experience long-term emotional distress or grow up with distorted perceptions of healthy relationships.

While the prevalence and effects of marital rape are significant, there is a lack of comprehensive research on its specific psychosocial consequences among married couples in Nigeria. This gap in knowledge hinders the development of effective intervention strategies and support systems for victims. Furthermore, there is limited understanding of how marital rape shapes the emotional and psychological well-being of both spouses, as well as the broader social dynamics within Nigerian families and communities. Raping of women by their husbands is a crime which is on the increase, not only in Africa continent but also across the globe. Sardinha, Maheu-Giroux, Stockl and Meyer (2022) reported that globally, around one-fifth of married women worldwide, or 27% of them, have been victims of intimate relationship rape and other violent acts. A research reported that the prevalence of physical and sexual intimate partner violence among all women who had been in a relationship was 30.0% worldwide, and 36.6% in the Africa continent alone (World Health Organisation, (WHO) 2013). In a 2016 study on violence against women in Tajikistan, the Human Rights Council polled 900 women over the age of 14 in three different regions of the nation. The study showed that 47% of married women agreed their husbands had forced them to have sex.

According to the United States Department of State (2018), 16.3% of Turkish women often and 35.6% of women occasionally suffered marital rape. One of the cruellest and most traumatizing types of violence that women of all backgrounds and statuses may encounter is rape (Akinlusi, Rabi, Olawepo, Adewunmi, Ottun & Akinola, 2014). Ogunwale, Oshiname and Ajuwon (2012) stated that studies have indicated that most incidences of rape involving women are committed by men of intimate partners, such as husbands and relatives. However, one of the most common and unreported cases of rape is marital rape. There is paucity of study on the psychosocial consequences of marital rape in Nigeria compared to the established facts on it in the Western worlds. Although, a number of studies have isolated information on its consequences but such studies have either become obsolete or outdated in their empirical facts. For example the study conducted by Esere, Idowu, Durosaro and Omotosho (2009) on rated topic is over a decade ago. The study of Aurelie, Guy, Patrick and Li (2016) on mental health consequences of being raped was conducted in far-away Democratic Republic of Congo, which found that victims of rape develop different mental responses, and maintained further that post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) was the most frequent mental response of victims in this group. The study conducted by Ogunwale, Dipeolu and Olaitan (2020) assessed the knowledge and perceptions about marital rape among married women in Oyo State, Nigeria and their

study found a higher proportion of respondents with marriage duration of above 20 years (84.6%) to have had experience of marital rape, compared with those whose marriage duration was between 0-10 years (64.9%). From all indications, the present study is timely, as it intends to fill the gaps left behind by the aforementioned previous studies. This study aims to exploring facts surrounding psychosocial consequences of marital rape on married couples in Nigeria, with the goal of informing public health policies, legal reforms, and support mechanisms for affected individuals and communities. Thus, this study examined the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by married adults in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study rests on the following objectives that is:

1. To examine the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria.
2. To determine whether there is difference in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria based on their gender, age, religion and length of year in marriage.

Research Question

1. What are the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria?

Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria based on gender, age, religion and length of year in marriage.

Methodology

This study employed descriptive survey method to investigate psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria. The study's population was all married adults in Nigeria. However, the target population of this study comprised all literate married adults from eighteen (18) years and above aged married adults across the six geo-political zones in the country. The population of this study as at 2023 was estimated as 71,628,812 by the National Population Commission of Nigeria. The sample size of this study was put at 1,614 which was determined by Research Advisor (2006).

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling method which involves; purposive, stratified and simple random to select its respondents from the population of the study. Self-designed instrument that was titled as "Psychosocial Consequences of Marital Rape Questionnaire (PCMRQ)" was used to collect data from the respondents. The instrument consisted of twenty structured items on the psychosocial consequences of marital rape. The instrument was subjected to face validity among five scholars in the field of counselling and psychology, and it was affirmed being valid for the study. It was subjected to reliability test of measure of stability (test-retest) and has a score of 0.87 reliability coefficient. The PCMRQ was patterned on a Four-Point Likert-Type rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; and Strongly Disagree = 1. Thus, the average (benchmark) mean value of respondents' responses was 2.50 (that is $4+3+2+1/4 = 10/4 = 2.50$). So, any mean score that is above 2.50 was considered as a well perceived psychosocial consequences of marital rape among married adults in Nigeria. Both the descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the data analysis in the

study. Thus, the demographic data of the respondents was analysed using descriptive statistics such as; frequency and percentage, while means and rank order were used to answer the research question. Finally, inferential statistic of Univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. However, the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

On the final note, a total number of 1,555 questionnaire were valid for data analysis out of 1,614 sample of the study. The result of the demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented as follows:

Table 1: Distributions of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage %	
1.	Gender	Male	790	50.8
		Female	765	49.2
		Total	1555	100.0
2.	Age	18-40 Year	751	48.3
		41 Year & Above	804	51.7
		Total	1555	100.0
3.	Religion	ATR	65	4.1
		Christianity	643	41.4
		Islam	847	54.5
		Total	1,555	100.0
4.	Length of Y in M.	0-5 Yrs.	349	22.4
		6-10 yrs.	588	37.8
		11 Yrs. & Above	618	39.8
		Total	1,555	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents that participated in the study. From this table therefore it is indicated that out of the 1,555 respondents, 790 (50.8%) were male and 765 (49.2%) were female. With regards to the participants' age; 751 (48.3%) were within the age bracket of 18-40 years old, while 804 (51.7%) were aged from 41 years and above. Concerning the religious affiliation of the respondents, 65 (4.1%) were from African Traditional Religion (ATR), 643 (41.4%) were Christians, while 847 (54.5%) of the respondents were Muslims. On the length of years spent in marriage, 349 (22.4%) participants had married between 0-5 years, while 588 (37.8%) had married between 6-10 years, and finally, 618 (39.8%) had been into their marriage from 11 years ago and above.

Research Question One:

What are the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by married adults in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Expressions on the Psychosocial Consequences of Marital Rape

S/No.	Forcing wife to sex by the husband could result to:	Mean	S.D.	Rank
1.	Strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness by the wife	3.63	0.590	1st
2.	Avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder)	3.52	0.743	2nd
3.	Painful sexual intercourse (Dyspareunia)	3.48	0.500	3rd
4.	Loss of trust or feeling of being betrayed	3.26	0.437	4th
5.	Intermittent headache	3.26	0.798	5th
6.	Miscarriage of a pregnant wife	3.20	0.403	6th
7.	Strong feelings of shame by the wife	3.11	1.160	7th
8.	Withdrawal from social activities	3.09	0.554	8th
9.	Strong feelings of anxiety	3.08	1.190	9th
10.	Suicide ideation by the woman	3.00	0.895	10th
11.	Unwanted pregnancy	2.99	0.676	11th
12.	Abortion which may lead to sterility or death	2.98	0.656	12th
13.	Marital divorce	2.98	1.060	13th
14.	Inability of the wife to function effectively in different areas of life	2.97	0.612	14th
15.	Expression of low self-esteem	2.84	1.100	15th
16.	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	2.83	1.260	16th
17.	Manifestation of isolation character	2.80	0.990	17th
18.	Sleep disturbances on the part of the woman	2.79	1.170	18th
19.	Morbid fear of opposite sex or fear of men throughout life	2.39	0.826	19th
20.	Chronic pelvic pain	2.36	0.840	20th

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviation and rank order analysis of the respondents' expressions on the psychosocial consequences of marital rape. Table 2 shows that items 4, 19 and 17 which state that forcing wife to sex by the husband could result to: strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness by the wife; avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (hypoactive sexual desire disorder); and painful sexual intercourse (dyspareunia) ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd with the mean scores of 3.63, 3.52 and 3.48 respectively, on the other hand, items 7, 14 and 16 which states that forcing wife to sex by the husband was high and it could result to: sleep disturbances on the part of the woman; morbid fear of opposite sex or fear of men throughout life; and chronic pelvic pain ranked 18th, 19th and 20th with the mean scores of 2.79, 2.39 and 2.36 respectively. Since majority of the items (18 items) had the mean scores that were above 2.50 cut-off points, it can be said that respondents attested to many psychological consequences, which includes: strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness by the wife; avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (hypoactive sexual desire disorder); painful sexual intercourse (dyspareunia); loss of trust or feeling of being betrayed; intermittent headache among others were most identified consequences of marital rape.

Hypothesis Testing

There is no significant difference in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by selected married adults in Nigeria based on gender, age, religion and length of years in marriage.

Table 3: Univariate Analysis of Variance showing differences in the Respondents' Expressions on the Psychosocial Consequences of Marital Rape Based on Gender, Age, Religion and Length of Years in Marriage

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	5959.47 ^a	35	170.27	4.67	.000
Intercept	1531278.16	1	1531278.16	42041.92	.000
Gender	73.63	1	73.63	2.02	.155
Age	545.20	1	545.20	14.96*	.000
Religion	22.09	2	11.04	0.303	.738
Length of Years in Marriage	297.25	2	148.62	4.08*	.017
Error	55325.99	1519	36.42	—	—
Total	5758360.00	1555	—	—	—
Corrected Total	61285.47	1554	—	—	—

a. R Squared = .097 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 presents the results of the Univariate Analysis of Variance showing difference in the respondents' expressions on the psychosocial consequences of marital rape based on their demographic variables such as gender, age, religion and length of years in marriage. In the case of gender, the calculated F-value was 2.02 and p-value was .155 which was greater than 0.05 significance. Since the calculated p-value was greater than 0.05 significance level it could be inferred that male and female respondents were not different in their expressions on the psychosocial consequences on marital rape. Based on age, calculated F-value was 14.96 and p-value was .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value was less than the level of significance thus, this indicates that respondents were different in their expressions based on age. The calculated F-value of religion was .303, while the calculated p-value was .738 which was greater than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value was greater than significance level thus, it could be inferred that there was no significant difference in the expressions of the respondents based on religion.

On the length of years in marriage, the calculated F-value is 4.08, while calculated p-value is .017 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance thus, it could be inferred that there was a significant difference in the expressions of the respondents based on length of years in marriage. Therefore, the finding of the hypothesis tested revealed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by selected married adults in Nigeria based on gender and religion, but significant differences were found based on age and length of years in marriage. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is presented on Table 4 below:

Table 4: Scheffe post-hoc psychosocial consequences where significant differences lies based on Length of years in Marriage

Length of years in marriage	N	Sub set for Alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
6-10 years	588	60.26	
11 years and above	618	60.31	
5 years and below (0-5 years)	349		63.36*
Sig.		.992	1.000

Table 4 indicates that respondents who spent between 6-10 years in marriage and those who spent 11 years and above in marriage have the mean scores of 60.26 and 60.31 (in subset 1), while those who spent 5 years and below in marriage had a highest mean score of 63.36 (in subset 2) and thus, contributed more to the significant difference than other groups. Hence, respondents who had spent 5 years and below in marriage with the highest mean score of 63.36 that led to the significant difference noted in hypothesis tested in this study in the Table 3 above.

Discussion of the Findings

The first findings of this study suggested that common psychosocial consequences of marital rape among married adults in Nigeria are; strong feeling of sadness or unhappiness by the wife; avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (hypoactive sexual desire disorder); painful sexual intercourse (dyspareunia) among other consequences. These findings are in some way concurred with the findings of the previous studies such as; Yllo and Finkelhor (2013) who stated that victims of marital rape experience depression, self-blame, lower self-esteem and have greater negative feelings towards sex and men in general. Enobakhare, Eromon, Ohenhen and Odiko (2008) posited that rape crime is characterized with antecedent health problems, illness of the whole body with psychological, physical and social consequences that can lead to chronic problems such as depression, alcohol and drug use, panic disorder, suicide ideation as well as PTSD. Ogunwale, Dipeolu and Olaitan (2020) also averred that married women often experienced rape in the hand of their husbands and this poses serious consequences to their health in the form of physical and vagina injuries, STIs, gynaecological complications and psychosocial consequences.

The null hypothesis tested in this study revealed that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by the married adults in Nigeria based on their gender and religion, but there were significant differences in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape based on their age and length of years in marriage. These findings however, corroborated and negated some previously established findings. For instance, Felson and Pare (2015) whose study found no significant gender differences in symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among survivors of spousal rape, and Kimerling, Alvarez, Pavao, Kaminski, Baumrind and Bryant (2017) whose study's finding also revealed no gender differences in depression and anxiety symptoms among survivors of marital rape. Yore and London (2014) asserted that regardless of religious beliefs, the traumatic nature of the marital rape experience may lead to similar psychosocial consequences among survivors. The study of Smith, Johnson and Thompson (2018) found that younger survivors of spousal rape reported higher levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of depression and anxiety, compared to older survivors. Johnson and Anderson (2020) found that younger survivors were more likely to experience disruptions in their social relationships

while older survivors on the other hand, face challenges related to financial independence and employment, as they may have been economically dependent on their abusive partners for a longer period. Johnson and Ferraro (2002); Peloquin, Sabourin, Lussier and Wright (2011) also found in their studies that individuals who had been married for longer period of time did report higher level of psychological distress following spousal rape while compared to the counterparts who had spent shorter periods in their marriages, and this could be attributed to the deep emotional bond and trust that might have developed between the married couples over time.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that the major psychosocial consequences of marital rape among the married adults in Nigeria are; strong feelings of sadness or unhappiness by the wife; avoidance of sexual relationship for a long period (hypoactive sexual desire disorder); painful sexual intercourse (dyspareunia); loss of trust or feeling of being betrayed; intermittent headache among others were most identified consequences of marital rape. The study also concluded that there were no significant differences in the psychosocial consequences of marital rape as expressed by selected married adults in Nigeria based on gender and religion, but significant differences were found based on age and length of years spent in marriage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1. The marital counsellors should focus more on the feelings and emotions of married women in polygamous marriage.
2. Husbands should be encouraged to engage their wives' consents and be ensured is given before having sexual affairs with them.
3. Married adults irrespective of their gender and religion should be educated on the inherent danger of marital rape for women.
4. The couples who have married for long should be adequately educated on the need to control their emotionality while in the mood to have sex with their partners.
5. The young couples should be encouraged to always seek for marital counselling from the professionals on any concern regarding their marital relationship.
6. Implication for Counselling Marital Counselling Practice

The present study' results underscore the unhealthy pattern of spousal sexual relationship which calls for urgent action of counselling intervention and approach from the marital counselling perspectives. The married counsellors who are trained in area of this important marital relationship need to be acquainted with realities of polygamous marriage by going more deeply into the psychosocial consequences of marital rape and proffer possible professional solutions to them. There is no doubt that marital rape among married adults women comes with punishing experiences that needed professional assistance to overcome. The counsellors in this context, should be more vigilant and apply appropriate counselling approaches to resolve the underlying causal factors and its attendant consequences. Counsellors should also intensify efforts in facilitating an improved marital relationship, effective communication strategies among individuals in marital relationship in the polygamous context. Although, there may be no perfect family, the ideal is to prevent all forms of detrimental effects such as psychosocial problems that could emanate from marital relationship, and marital counsellor in this context, has a great role to play.

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