

The Prevalence and Correlates of Psychological Abuse among Women in Kenya
A Cross-Sectional Study Using Multilevel Analysis
Chiho Suzuki

Department of International Health and Development, Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, 1440 Canal Street, Suite 2200, New Orleans, LA 70112; E-mail: chihosuzuki@hotmail.com; Tel: 1-504-988-6517; Fax: 1-504-584-3653

Violence against women by their intimate partner is a key public health agenda, and is recognized as a serious threat to health and a violation of human rights. Violence is a traumatic and dehumanizing experience, and has a profound effect on victims. Women who have been a victim of emotional violence (such as being ridiculed and verbally harassed) describe the experience as psychologically degrading, frightening, and humiliating experience, leaving her in distress with long-term effects on her self-esteem. Emotional violence, therefore, may reduce her ability to cope with her spouse's violent behavior, and to escape from the cycle of violence that tends to perpetuate, putting her at risk of other health consequences. Moreover, there is evidence that emotional abuse is positively associated with health-compromising behaviors such as illegal drug use, excessive drinking, negative health perceptions, diminished ability to cope with stressful situations in life, and cognitive impairment.

Research that examines the prevalence of and factors associated with violence against women have been conducted and theories developed primarily in the US and in other western countries. While the issue has been widespread in all corners of the world, and despite the growing concern and attention given to non-western countries, the number of studies carried out in the developing world has been limited and small-scale, both in terms of study population size and location. In Africa, investigations have been carried out in South Africa, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. However, these studies in Africa are not nationally representative. Specifically in Kenya, there has not been any study conducted on this topic using a nationally representative sample.

The objective of this study is to fill this research gap. Specifically, the study will identify risk and protective factors associated with women's experience of emotional abuse by their intimate partner. The site of the current study is Kenya. It will draw on the findings of research carried out in other countries including those of Africa, as well as western countries. Furthermore, it has been widely

recognized that violence against women occurs in the context in which various individual as well as socio-cultural, economic and political factors operating at multiple levels interact, driven by several sets of theories that affect the outcome of interest. Based on these findings, the current study will take an integrated theoretical approach, draw on an ecological framework originally developed by Heise as a foundation, adapt it to the current study, and use multilevel analyses to identify significant factors associated with women's experience of emotional abuse by their partner.

This study focuses specifically on women's experience of emotional abuse by their partner, and seeks to answer the question: What are the factors associated with recent experience of emotional abuse by their partner among ever-married women in Kenya? The research questions will be examined using the 2003 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2003 KDHS), which is a nationally representative sample survey, carried out between April and September 2003. Women between the age of 15 to 49, and men between the ages of 15 to 54 were selected to participate in the survey. What makes the 2003 KDHS unique is that this was the first DHS survey conducted in Kenya to include data collection on domestic violence. To measure spousal violence, the survey used a modified and shortened form of Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) originally developed by Murray Straus. Female respondents were asked questions related to intimate partner violence by specific acts of violence (specific type of emotional violence, physical violence and sexual violence), the frequency of such incident in the last 12 months preceding the survey, and violence by any person since age 15. This study will maximize the utility of the information collected in Kenya to examine the prevalence and correlates of emotional abuse.

Primary dependent variable of interest is women's experience of emotional violence in the last 12 months. It is a dichotomous variable: "yes" (defined as those who experienced at least one incident of emotional abuse in the past 12 month) and "no" (defined as those who did not experience emotional abuse in the past 12 months).

By using the data collected at households, the study will determine the extent to which the strength of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable is attenuated or modified as multi-level factors (individual, household, partner, and community factors) are added in the analysis. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, logit model will be used for the multivariate analysis.

This study focuses on the following theories that describe the phenomenon of violence against women: (1) Resource Theory; (2) Status Inconsistency Theory; (3) Stress Theory; and (4) Feminist Theory.

Expectations with regard to the study findings are as follows:

- (1) Women's status as measured by her educational achievement and her income earning is negatively associated with her experience of emotional abuse (Resource Theory).
- (2) Women, who hold relatively higher status in the household than their husbands/partners, as measured by educational achievement and occupational status, are at increased risk of experiencing emotional abuse (Status Inconsistency Theory).
- (3) Women living in households experiencing stress, as measured by the number of children living in the household) are more likely to experience emotional abuse (Stress Theory).
- (4) Women who exercise more power relative to her partner in the household decision-making process are at increased risk of emotional abuse (Feminist Theory).

Findings of this study will not only contribute to the area of research on this topic, but will also provide valuable inputs to the design of HIV prevention programs promoting safer sexual health among adolescents, particularly in South Africa.