



Gender Attitudes and Domestic Violence against Men in Literature

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Abstract. Domestic violence remains a burning issue within the family and indeed in society. It has become common in society to see women, rather than men, being beaten, abused, and murdered by their intimate partners. Consequently, several scholarly works dwell more on domestic violence against women while ignoring or paying inadequate attention to the male experience. As a result, the present study examines domestic violence against men perpetrated by women through the lens of literature in Igbo. Ofomata's novel, *Ihe Ojoo gbaaAfo...* (1999), was purposively selected. Dollard et al.'s (1939) Frustration-Aggression Theory was employed as an analytical guide. The result shows that men suffer domestic violence, as epitomized in the protagonist Ikenna, who suffered constant abuse from his wife, Nkemdilim. Ikenna was subjected to verbal abuse, public scorn and humiliation, as well as physical attack, all by his wife. As a result, he suffered isolation from his family and friends, started avoiding his home, and resorted to drunkenness as a coping mechanism. In the end, Ikenna suffered low self-esteem and depression as a result of his wife's aggressive tendencies. The paper argues that women, like men, are perpetrators of domestic violence. However, men hardly cry out or report the abuse on them due to social stigma. Domestic violence against men should be condemned or eliminated, just as violence against women, because of its negative consequences on the abused and collateral effects on society.

Keywords: Igbo Literature, Igbo Novel, Igbo Culture, Gender Attitude, Domestic Violence, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender-Inclusive Violence (GIV), Male Victim, Female Perpetrator, Theories of Domestic Violence

1. Introduction

Literature, which reflects the life of every society, exposes one of the realities of life, which is intimate partner relationships (IPR) in the Igbo family. In most families in societies, families are burdened with one

marital problem or another, hence the occurrence of violence, whether physical, emotional, or psychological. Consequently, violence becomes a topical issue in society owing to its devastating effects on human life. It has become an unfortunate part of many people's daily lives. Violence, which occurs in the family, can be influenced by exposure to violent parents and violent images in the media, including television shows, movies, music videos, and electronic games, as well as pornography (White et al., 2009) and violent literary texts. As parents and children interact and relate in the family, there are bound to be frictions, actions, and reactions that may sometimes lead to domestic violence. Any member of the family could stand the risk of being violated physically, sexually, emotionally, and financially. At times, men, women, and children experience violence within or outside the family. Violence against women and girls kills and maims vast numbers of women and girls. It fills their lives with pain and terror, from which some never recover (UNIFEM, 2002). Feminists' voices rise in defense of the women and girls as victims of violence in intimate relationships.

Feminists assume men to be perpetrators of most domestic violence and consider domestic violence as a gender-based act. The feminists argue that gender role expectations, socialization, and power inequalities are central to understanding aggression and violence in both women and men. The feminists maintain that in societies where there is no formal hierarchy that privileges one group over another and in which women and men exercise relatively equal power, male violence against women, and rape are low (Andersen, 2003; White, et al., 2009; Shaw & Lee, 2009). In contrast, some scholars argue that there is gender symmetry in the use of aggression in relationships (Kimmel & Aronson, 2008; White et al., 2009). Men and women express the same aggressive attitude when confronting family issues, though they may handle their aggression differently. Men may be more likely than women to be aggressive or injure their partners, and the pattern of violence reflects gender differences

in size, strength, and the tendency to engage in violence, not male status, power, and dominance (Felson, 2009). Physical violence occurs in a variety of family relationships, where the husband assaults the wife. Though a wife may equally assault her husband, according to Miller (1994), it occurs less frequently.

While the issue of violence against women is pervasive, not much attention has been paid to violence against men in the context of the family. Probably because men rarely or hardly cry out or report violence against them for fear of societal stigma, shame, and disgrace (Hines, Lysova, & Douglas, 2025). Gender attitudes and beliefs that men are the sole perpetrators of domestic violence will lead to less empathy and support for abused men. Most men suffer terrible domestic violence at the hands of women. The men patiently endure the violence against them without crying out or reporting for help to avoid social criticism and stigma. Consequently, there is an urgent need to address the issue of domestic violence against men. This is because male violence has driven most men out of their families. It has also forced men into alcoholism, keeping late nights, depression, isolation, madness, suicide, and, in some other cases, untimely death. Men's unfortunate death can result in so many widows and fatherless children in society. It could also trigger economic instability, severe hardships for families, and a decline in the productive workforce, ultimately impacting economic growth in society. The purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the often-neglected subject of violence against men in the family through the lens of a literary work in Igbo, and in doing so fill the gap in literature.

2. Conceptualising Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is any aggressive behavior or maltreatment that occurs between intimate partners, in the privacy of a home or family. According to Shogbamu (2025:1), Domestic violence is violence that intimate partners and other family members perpetrate, and that is manifested through physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and acts of omission (also, UNICEF, 2000). It includes all hostile acts committed by one family member against another, irrespective of age, sex, social status, race, or emotional state. It includes such aggressive behaviors by which the victims are physically or emotionally harmed (Arinze-Umobi, 2008). Domestic violence, also termed domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, economical, or psychological actions or threats of

actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. It can also be in the form of slapping, hitting, choking, burning, cutting, or cursing, verbal abuse, and holding someone against their will (Griffith & Chadee, 2006; Adebayo, 2014). Verbal and emotional abuses include insults, name-calling, accusations of character and conduct, preventing one from taking up a job, forcing one to leave a job, preventing men from meeting any person in the normal course of events, threats to commit suicide, and any other verbal or emotional abuse (Adebayo, 2014; Shogbamu, 2025). Domestic violence can also take many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, battery), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse, and economic deprivation. Domestic violence is therefore a mix of physical and coercive behaviours designed to manipulate and dominate another competent adult or adolescent, to achieve compliance and dependence. Domestic violence includes wife beating, wife battering, man beating, husband battering, domestic abuse, spousal abuse, and family violence, with some legal jurisdictions having specific definitions. Intimate partner violence is gender based and is a serious public health problem that cuts across nations, cultures, religion, and class (Adebayo, 2014).

3. Gender Attitudes towards Domestic Violence

Gender, as a term, was popularized in the 1970s by feminists (Cislaghi & Lori, 2019) who view gender as the social and cultural construction of masculine and feminine identities, roles, norms, and relationships, rather than an immutable personality trait grounded in biological sex (Kagesten et al., 2016). Feminist sociologists advanced this idea further, arguing that gender is best conceptualized as a social system that apportions resources, roles, power, and entitlements according to whether a person or practice is perceived as male or female, masculine or feminine. Most existing gender systems are deeply hierarchical, privileging that which is male or masculine over that which is female or feminine (Cislaghi & Lori, 2019). Attitude is a state of mind or feeling concerning some matter (Harrell, 2005, p. 2). Attitudes are categorized as a mental state, conscious or unconscious; value, belief, or feeling; and a predisposition to behaviour. However, attitude can be a settled disposition and attitude reflecting the assumed opinion. Consequently, gender attitude is an individual's perceptions, beliefs, or endorsement of gender norms. Gender norms are

accepted social rules that govern roles, traits, behaviors, status, and power associated with masculinity and femininity in a given culture (Kagesten et al., 2016, p. 3). Norms are but one element of the gender system, along with gender roles, gender socialization, and gender-power relations. In this account, gender norms are the social rules and expectations that keep the gender system intact (Cislaghi & Lori, 2019).

Feminists' attitudes towards domestic violence are that men abuse women due to their social male behavioral expectations. Men's power, aggression, and dominance result from societal rules and expectations tied to masculinity, while women's passivity, humility, and subjectivity result from societal expectations tied to femininity. Consequently, culturally based socialization practices and traditions influence gender attitudes toward domestic violence (Hadi, 2025), which encourage men to be aggressors and women to be victims. Most societies approve domestic violence against women as a typical way men discipline and control their wives. They blame the victims and treat the aggressor leniently (White et al, 2009; Adabayo, 2014). Incidentally, gender attitudes, myths, and misconceptions prevent many people from understanding that both men and women experience violence in the family. Men and women can be perpetrators and/or victims of domestic violence. Most men who are abused remain in the abusive relationship out of fear of societal ridicule. The traditional notion that men are inherently the aggressors while women are the victims has made it nearly impossible for men to report abuse (Tshoane et al., 2024; Shogbanu, 2025). These stereotype makes them mute and undermine their experiences, and also lead to belittling and ignoring men's abuse by their wives.

4. Domestic Violence against Men

Domestic violence against men is a term describing violence that is committed against men by their intimate partners (IP). Domestic violence against men deals with violence experienced by men or boys in an intimate relationship, such as marriage, cohabitation, dating, or within a family. Male victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) have become a serious issue even in the United States (Srivastava, 2013, p. 1193). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) (2024), one in seven men age 18+ in the U.S. has been the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner (IP) in his lifetime. One in 10 men has experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner. In 2013, 13% of documented contacts identified themselves as male victims. Although they make up a

smaller percentage of callers to the hotline, there are likely many more men who do not report or seek help for their abuse, for a variety of reasons: men are socialized not to express their feelings or see themselves as victims; pervading beliefs or stereotypes about men being abusers, women being victims; the abuse of men is often treated as less serious, or a "joke"; and many believe there are no resources or support available for male victims (National Domestic Violence Hotline).

Several researchers and commentators have suggested that assaults upon men by their wives constitute a social problem comparable in nature and magnitude to that of wife-beating (Kimmel & Aronson, 2008). The results of almost 200 studies using data from surveys of family problems and conflicts show that "... women are as physically aggressive, or more aggressive, than men in their relationships.... The aggregate sample size in the reviewed studies exceeds 58,000" (Straus & Ramirez, 2009: 141). The victimization of men by their partners is a serious social problem, and it is largely ignored by society. A part of America's social norm reveals that men are the stronger and more dominant gender who do not allow women to dominate. Consequently, male victims do not freely admit being victims of intimate partner violence at the hands of females (Barber, 2008).

This popular ideology of male domination has led to difficulty believing that females were capable of being perpetrators of intimate partner violence (IPV) and whether females were acting in self-defense from their attackers (Hines, Brown, and Dunning, 2007). In a review of research on women's use of violence with male intimate partners, Swan et al. (2008) reveal that studies consistently find that there are as many women self-report perpetrating physical aggression as do men; some studies find a higher prevalence of physical aggression committed by women and use such acts more frequently. For example, the National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) shows that a nationally representative study of 6,002 men and women found that in the year before the survey, 12.4% of wives self-reported that they used violence against their husbands compared to 11.6% of husbands who self-reported using violence against their wives. Furthermore, 4.8% of wives reported using severe violence against their husbands, whereas 3.4% of husbands reported using severe violence. Studies with college samples also find that men and women commit similar rates of physical aggression or that a higher prevalence of women commits physical aggression.

Male victims often feel ashamed that this act of violence happens to them and struggle to decide what

to do next Adebayo, 2014. This was seen as a problem because males feel that they cannot address this matter because no one will listen to them and that any type of treatment will not help them solve their problems. Male victims are silent about the domestic violence incidents and do not contact authorities because they think that it is a personal matter and they can take care of it. Battered men think that they will not be taken seriously if they go to the authorities to report because of the stigma that domestic violence only happens to women and not men (Adebayo, 2014; Shogbam, 2025). Notwithstanding feminists' hue and cries about domestic violence against women across the globe, domestic violence against men is a reality. It occurs virtually in every society in varying degrees. The problem in conducting studies that seek to describe violence in terms of gender is the amount of silence, fear, and shame that results from abuse within families and relationships. The tragedy is that men who find themselves in this situation hide and do not talk openly about their experience, as talking about it will bruise their ego and expose them to ridicule in a patriarchal society (Adebayo, 2014). Consequently, domestic violence against men remains largely unreported (Hamel, 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Adebayo, 2014; Mohammad and Najmeh, 2017; Sanjay, 2019; Hines, Lysova, and Douglas, 2025).

5. Theoretical Framework

The study draws eclectic theoretical orientations and techniques to explain the promoting factors, patterns, and consequences of women's violence against men in the family as portrayed in Ofofata's *Ihe Ojoo gbaa Afo* (1999). Theories of John Dollard et al. (1939), Frustration-Aggression Theory, also known as the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis, was originally proposed by a group of psychologists, John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Hobart Mowrer, and Robert Sears in their book, *Frustration and Aggression* (1939). The theory states that the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Frustration in this sense is not understood as an emotional experience but as an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response. Consequently, frustration was defined as an event instead of an effective state. It is any obstacle that prevents one from achieving a goal (Breuer and Elson, 2017, p. 1; Kruglanski et al., 2023, p. 2).

Dollard and his associates explain the link between frustration and aggression by showing that people react aggressively due to frustration. For instance, when an individual is prevented from achieving a goal,

he/she is frustrated, and the frustration in turn leads to aggression. Kruglanski et al. (2023: 2) argue that aggressive reaction is a primordial way of demonstrating power and dominance, which are valued attributes that bestow significance on the actor. Frustration-Aggression theory suggests that frustration can increase the likelihood of aggression, and if aggressive impulses are strong and unchecked, they may lead to violent behavior. According to Ogunyemi and Aborisade (2023: 74-75), Frustration-Aggression presupposes that a human tendency to exhibit violence is a result of disappointment with the social situation they encounter. It argues that anger may cause someone to exhibit violent action, which in certain circumstances includes domestic violence. For instance, when someone's aim or ambition is blocked, thwarted, obstructed, or frustrated, anger can occur, which may lead to violent conduct as a way to deal with the frustration to achieve the expected goal (also see Elena et al., 2003).

In a marriage, if a partner is incapable of maintaining their desired quality of life due to a lack of finances, they may attack, strike, and abuse the other partner physically or verbally. It is the opinion that the unfavorable attack is a way of dealing with discontent and frustration, and the purging or relieving of emotional tensions. Domestic violence may occur for a variety of reasons, including power and control dynamics, patriarchal terrorism, psychological disorder, alcohol abuse, financial strain, marital challenges, unemployment, low economic status, stress, isolation, machismo, drug abuse/addition, personality characteristics, mental health conditions, exposure to cycle of violence, dependency, jealousy, and possessiveness (Walker, 1979; Gelles, 1993; Jouriles & McDonald, 2002; Ogunyemi & Aborisade, 2023). In the context of domestic violence against men, frustration may come from a variety of things, including marital challenges, money concerns, or outside stresses like employment or health problems. The abuse might take the form of a recurring pattern, with resentment often giving way to violent action (Ogunyemi & Aborisade, 2023: 75).

Although the strong version of the theory of Frustration and Aggression was modified by two members of the original team, Miller (1941) and Sears (1941), who argue that frustration does not always lead to aggressive or violent behavior, but that aggression is the inevitable response to frustration. However, frustration stimulates several different inclinations, besides an inclination to aggress, such as an inclination to escape or to find a way around the obstacle to the goal. In other words, people learn through experiences to respond to frustration with aggressive or

nonaggressive responses/ behavior. Buss (1966:161) also argues that aggression can occur without frustration and that frustration is a weak determinant of aggression. He views attack as the primary cause of aggression (Kruglanski et al., 2023, p. 2). Consequently, the frustration-aggression Theory may have highlighted the reasons for domestic violence, but there are other theories as to why domestic violence exists.

6. Analysis Of Domestic Violence Against Men in *The Ojoo Gbaa Afo...*

Ofomata shows the evidence of domestic violence against men in his novel, *The Ojoo Gbaa Afo*. He reveals that some women can be generally aggressive, violent, especially to their husbands, due to their lack of love for their husbands, excessive possessiveness, jealousy, and their husbands' inability to perform their ordained responsibility as the family head. He reveals that a woman's character is important in a marriage. This, in essence, affirms the traditional Igbo parlance that "*Mma nwaanyi bu agwa ya*" (A woman's beauty is in her character). Marrying a girl because of her beauty does not guarantee a peaceful marriage. In Igbo society, once a man reaches the age of reasoning, his parents would caution him about whom to marry.

In the novel, it was shown that Ikenna, the protagonist, secured a good job in Enugu after graduation from the university, but before he departed for the city, his parents advised him about city life. Precisely, his mother, who is aware of some women's devious behaviour, especially those in the city, warns him to be wary of such women:

Nwa m, ekelere m Chukwu na i nwetala oru. Ugbu a itoruola ihe e ji nwoke eme. O buru na I laghachi Enugwu, achoro m ka iburu ihe ndi a m ga-agwa gi n'obi mgbe o bu. Nwa m, anyi bu umunwany joro njo nke ukwu. Nwoke o bu nwany gburu anaghi agba obara. N'ih ya, kpachara anya gi nke oma n'obodo mepere emepe a i na-aga maka na nwoke nwanyi egbughi na-anogologo ndu. Chukwu dube gi. (13)

(My child, I thank God that you have gotten a job. Now, you are of age. If you go back to Enugu, I want you to remember this thing I will tell you all the time. My child, we women are terrible. Any man whom a woman killed does not bleed. In this regard, be very careful of the city you are going to, because a man whom a woman does not kill will live long. May God guide you.)

His father also warns him against such city women:
Nwa m, lezie anya ebe ahụ i na-aga. Marakwa na nwoke o bu nwany na-afuru opi ji okpa awula be ndi mmuo. Otu mkpuru okwu ezuolara nwata maara

ihe. Ga nke oma. Okwa Igbo kwuru okwu si na Ihe okenye no ala were hu nwatakiri kwuru oto o gaghị ahụ ya. (13)

(My child, be watchful of the place you are going. Know that any man whose wife blows a flute goes to the spirit world using the feet. One word is enough for the wise. Safe journey. Igbo said that what an elder seated down to see, a child cannot see it standing up.)

The counseling from both parents, particularly the mother, proves the possibility that women are evil. The mother's use of the inclusive third person pronoun "*anyi bu umunwany joro njo nke ukwu*" (13) (We women are too evil) is borne out of knowledge and experience, from her own and other women. The father's use of the proverb "*nwoke o bu nwany na-afuru opi ji okpa awula be ndi mmuo*" (13) (any man whose wife blows a flute for him goes to the spirit world using the feet) implies that any man who is directed or controlled by a woman will not die a good death. In traditional Igbo society, the flute is a musical instrument used to inflame the emotions of dancers or masquerades to enable them perform optimally. It is mainly used in panegyrics for ululation. In the context of marriage, the stance of Ikenna's father is that any man who dances to the tune of his wife or who aligns with the whims and caprices of the wife will not end well.

Unfortunately, Ikenna ignored his parents' advice. He has a well-paid job and lives a very comfortable life in Enugu. He befriends several women and spends most of his salary on them. He rarely visits his parents or spends on them. He is fond of beautiful women and lures them into befriending him by promising them marriage and lavishing money on them. He falls in love with a woman named Nkemdilim based only on her beauty. Although his friends and family had warned him against marrying Nkemdilim due to her bad character, Ikenna vowed that he would marry her or no other woman. Despite the counseling from Ikenna's parents and his friends, Ikenna goes ahead and marries Nkemdirim. Ofomata reveals that immediately Nkemdirim becomes Ikenna's wife, she changes her character towards him and starts maltreating him. Nkemdirim starts to abuse Ikenna verbally as seen in the excerpt below:

Kemgbe Ikenna lubatara Nkemdirim n'ulo ka ndi be Ikenna ha jiri mara n'ezie na o bu n'aji ka nwatakiri na-enwu ewu. O bughi naani na Nkemdirim na-emesu ndi be di ya mgbe o bu, kama nke kacha nke bu na o ji isi di ya bu Ikenna ekwuchi ite. (76)

(Since Ikenna married Nkemdilim into their house, Ikenna's people truly knew that it is by the hairs that children lead a goat. It is not only that Nkemdirim maltreats her husband's people all the time, but the

worst is that he uses the head of her husband, Ikenna, to cover a pot.)

In the excerpt above, the author uses an idiom to capture the frosty relationship between Ikenna and his wife. The idiom “*o ji isi di ya bu Ikenna ekwuchi ite*” (76) (She uses her husband’s head to cover a pot) indicates that Nkemdilim was in total control of Ikenna. It is whatever she wants that she does. The idiom is a powerful way of indicating that Ikenna had become a plaything in the hands of his wife.

One of the ways, Nkemdilim exemplified her violent attitude is in verbal abuse. She verbally abuses and insults Ikenna in every conversation, as seen in the excerpt below.

Ihere malitere mewe ya mgbe ndi agbataobi ha ji nwayo nwayo na-agbaputa ka ha bia nuru kwa olu Nkemdirim. Ikenna baara nwunye ya mba ka o mechie onu ya n’ihe ndi ahụ o na-ekwu n’ihi na o maghi ma ara o yiwala ya... O si Ikenna, Anuohia, onye ka I na-abara mba? I chere na m bu nwa nkita be gi. I puola zuzuchaa, were bata ka I bawara nwankita be gi. Ihere anaghi eme gi na o bu mgbe o buka, umuokorobia ibe gi ana-arafu gi” (99).

(Ikenna was ashamed of himself when his neighbours were running out of their houses to witness Nkemdirim’s insults on him. Ikenna scolded his wife to shut her mouth from all the abuses she was raining on him, because he didn’t know if she was getting mad... She told Ikenna, A wild Animal. Who are you scolding? Do you think that I am your house puppy? You have gone out to mess up and were back to scold your house puppy. You are not ashamed of yourself, that all the time your fellow young men will be deceiving you.)

Ikenna’s neighbours are aware of Nkemdirim’s bad behaviour towards Ikenna, as they were the witnesses to her evil character. In this event, the neighbours heard her raised voice, as was the custom, and came out to hear her verbally abusing Ikenna. She called Ikenna *Anuohia* “A wild animal,” warned him about cautioning her, accused him of fooling around town, and tells him that he is shameless. The act of referring to Ikenna as an animal and fooling about, suggests that she did not have any modicum of respect for her husband. It also indicates that she was in complete control of him. Verbal abuse is an act of violence; although it is not a physical attack on the body, it is an attack on the mind. The abuse on Ikenna is a way of humiliating him in public and that act is capable of adversely affecting his self-esteem and self-worth. Even when Nkemdirim is pregnant, she didn’t desist from her abusive behaviour towards Ikenna. She aggressively abuses and attacks Ikenna whenever he warns her about her behaviour towards his family. But

Nkemdilim did not stop at verbally abusing only Ikenna; she also directed her tongue against Ikenna’s friends and family, which ultimately resulted in Ikenna losing his nuclear networks, as seen in the next excerpt:

Mana ihe kacha ewute Ikenna n’ebe nwunye ya no bu na o chusachaala ndi enyi ya niile. O nweghizikwa onye na-achota ya n’ihi na Nkemdirim anaghi ele ha ezigbo anya ma ha bia. Ndi enyi Ikenna Nkemdirim bu uzọ were mesuo bu Arinze na Builo (77).

(But what saddens Ikenna about his wife’s attitude is that she has driven all his friends away. None of them comes to visit him because Nkemdilim does not welcome them when they come. The first of Ikenna’s friends that Nkemdilim provoked were Arinze and Builo.)

Nkemdirim attacks and abuses Arinze and Builo whenever they visit Ikenna in their house and warns them never to set foot there again. They disassociate themselves with Ikenna and do not care about what happens to him. She maltreats and drives away Ikenna’s brother, Ejindu, who stays with them to complete his education in Enugwu (137). As if it is not enough, she drives away Ikenna’s cousin, who visited Ikenna’s house in Enugwu, for his job interview after his university education (96). To crown it all, she verbally abuses and drives away Ikenna’s mother, who stays in her son’s house because of her sickness. She does not care about her health; she starves her of food and insults her daily to the extent that the woman cries when narrating how she treats her to her son, until she decides to leave their house (205). Acting in such a way to disconnect a person from his network of friends and family is an act of violence; the victim is left alone and, in that position, loses the social relationships that are so vital and beneficial for life and survival.

One other means Nkemdirim deployed to exert control on Ikenna is through physical abuse; she physically fights Ikenna, as the following excerpt shows:

Nkemdirim gara n’oche ebe o no were na-eche uwa ya, dodo ya n’akwa were na-asị ya na o ga-agwa ya ebe o hapuru ya gawa...Ikenna achoghi itupuru ya onu... Nkemdirim kwara ya aka were si ya zaa ya ihe o juru ya. Aka ahụ o kwara ya foduru nwantakiri ka o meruo ya ahụ. Ikenna were nwayo si n’ala ebe o dara bilie n’ihi na mberede nyiri dike. O kwuru oto kpedo ihu n’ala, anyammiri ju ya anya... O gara ebe ahụ o (Ikenna) kwu dodokwa ya aka n’akwa wee na-asị ya na o bu taata ka ha abuo ga-atu onu dakpuo n’ime ya. ...Ikenna malitere tibe Nkemdirim ihe. O na-eti ya, O naghị ele anya n’azu. (102 -103).

(Nkemdirim went to where he sat lamenting his fate, held him on his cloth, and started asking him to tell her where she had left her and went...Ikenna did not want

to talk to her...Nkemdirim pushed him and asked him to respond. The push nearly hurt him. Ikenna gently rose from the floor where he had fallen because an emergency is a challenge for great people. He stood up, head bowed and eyes filled with tears...She went to the place he stood, held his cloth again, and continued to ask him that, it is today that two of them will burrow the earth and fall inside it...Ikenna started to beat Nkemdilim. He beat her without looking back.)

The excerpt reveals that Nkemdirim is really a quarrelsome and violent woman. Even though Ikenna was quietly on his own, thinking about his married life. He tried to avoid her trouble, but she went to him and grabbed his shirt, insisting on a response to her inquiry concerning his whereabouts. Against Ikenna's silence, she violently pushed him down, and he fell and almost hurt himself. After he stood up from the fall, she again grabbed his shirt and this time issued a threat. The threat is seen in the idiom "*taata ka ha abuo ga-atu onu dakpuo n'ime ya*" (103) (it is today that both of them will burrow the earth and fall inside it). This is Nkemdilim's way of saying that they will fight to the death. This is an indication that she was predisposed to violence and was ready to go to any extent to make trouble with Ikenna. Ikenna's reaction to beating her was borne out of frustration and helplessness. Notably, Ikenna was not the perpetrator of the violence; rather, he only reacted to the violence instigated by his wife. Ezeigbo (2012) reveals that negotiation and dialogue are sometimes more efficient in achieving success in human relations than aggression and confrontation. In the same manner, women, especially Igbo women, ought to be wise, sensitive, and proactive in their quest for justice and self-actualization. A woman should ensure peace and harmony in her family and not antagonism and aggression, which bring about separation and destruction of family life, by being committed to the survival and wholeness of the male and female.

After some time, Nkemdirim eventually give birth to a male child, and things become worse for Ikenna. The male child becomes a basis for Nkemdirim to exercise more domineering and aggressive behaviour towards Ikenna, as seen in the excerpt below:

O bughị naanị nwa ka Nkemdirim mụrụ, ọ mụkwuru okwunauka... O sịrị na ọ mụtala onye ga-agbara ya oḡu n'aka di ya... ihe ọ masizirị Ikenna ya mewe na ọ gbasaghị ya n'ihị na ya enweela ọṅokwu na be ya. Na ya abịala abia, ịla azu adighi ya. Nwa ahụ Nkemdirim mụtaara Ikenna koliri ya obi elu nke ukwu. O jizi maka ya were na-agbazi Ikenna ose n'anya... Naanị ihe ọ maara bu ubochi ọ buła ọ gwara Ikenna ihe ọ ga-azutara ya, Ikenna were hapu izuta ya, ọ kpọtụwa. (156).

(It is not only a child that Nkemdirim birthed; she also birthed trouble...She said that she had given birth to someone who would defend her against her husband...Whatever Ikenna wants to do, he should do it because she now has a voice in her house. That she has already come, and there is no going back. That child Nkemdirim gave birth to Ikenna, gave her so much pride. It is on account of that, she started smearing Ikenna's eyes with pepper...The only thing she knows is that, any day she tells Ikenna what to buy for her and Ikenna fails to buy it, abuse will start.)

According to the author, the child has become a source of trouble in the house "*O bughị naanị nwa ka Nkemdirim mụrụ, ọ mụkwuru okwunauka*" (156) (It is not only a child that Nkemdirim birthed, but she also birthed trouble). The male child becomes a source of pride to her because, in the traditional Igbo society, a married woman is never comfortable in her husband's house until she gives birth to a male child. Otherwise, she may lose her position as a wife or may be reduced to nothing in the family. As a result of this male child, she is emboldened to become more unruly with the confidence that she cannot be driven away from the family. According to the author, "*O jizi maka ya were na-agbazi Ikenna ose n'anya*" (156) (She used it as a reason to smear pepper in Ikenna's eyes). The idiom, "smearing pepper in the eyes," is an Igbo way of saying that someone is in a terrible state of suffering. In this case, it is Nkemdilim who is smearing pepper in Ikenna's eyes, meaning that she is really punishing him and making life unbearable for him. Another way the author used to show that Nkemdirim is using the child to make trouble with Ikenna is in terms of her needs as a nursing mother. The author states that, any time Ikenna does not oblige her by providing what she needs, there will be trouble. The use of the word *kpotuwa* "noise will start" is a figurative way of saying that, trouble will erupt in the house.

Thereafter, Nkemdirim stops breastfeeding her child and prefers to give him baby milk. She threatens Ikenna that if he fails to buy the expensive baby food, she will abandon the baby for him (157). Ikenna borrows money from colleagues whenever his salary runs out to buy food. At times, he buys on credit to pay back when he receives his salary. Ikenna thinks of sending her away from his house, but reluctantly decides to leave her because of the shame society will place on him, the suffering his child will go through without a mother, because he does not want to raise their child alone, coupled with his job. He decides to endure her, hoping she will change her cantankerous attitude in the future (106-107). This is to show that many men prefer to suffer in an abusive marriage

rather than expose the suffering they go through with their wives because of social criticisms and stigma.

As a result of the constant altercation and violence instigated by Nkemdilim, Ikenna became very uncomfortable coming home, as the home had turned into a theatre of violence, as shown in the excerpt, “*Kamgbe ọ luchara Nkemdịrịm, be ya anaghizi atọ ya uto. Ọ na-alọta be ya, obi ana-amapu ya*” (101) (Since he married Nkemdilim, his house was no longer delightful for him. While coming back home, he will be full of anxiety). As a result of this discomfort, Ikenna devises a means to come back home very late at night and eats outside. He gets drunk when coming back home to be able to sleep immediately his body touches his bed (105-106). He drinks not to think of his predicament. Consequently, Ikenna becomes lean to the extent that those who know him before he married Nkemdịrịm do not recognize him again. He is so skinny that his clothes hang on his body. Ikenna is ashamed of his predicament. He avoids his family, friends, and colleagues from finding out about his maltreatment by his wife. This is an indication that Ikenna had lapsed into depression because of the constant violence perpetrated by his wife.

In the end, it was the comity of *Umuokpu* (Daughters of the kindred) that came to Ikenna’s rescue. Ikenna’s aunt, Afuluenu, who is one of the heads of *Umuokpu*, plans with the other *Umuokpu* to discipline Nkemdịrịm. They warn Ikenna not to intervene in their matter with his wife, Nkemdịrịm, unless he wants to bury his father alone. Since he cannot control his wife and hides it from them from knowing about his marital problems, he should leave them to do their duty. Since he wants to die in his marriage, his sisters do not want him to die. The *Umuokpu* summon Nkemdịrịm, question her in the presence of some of their *Umunna* (Kindred) who paid a condolence visit to Ikenna, and she insults them. The *Umuokpu* confronted and beat her mercilessly; no one saved her, because they warned the *Umunna* to stay clear from the case. She cries and begs *Umuokpu* for forgiveness. They forgive her but warn her seriously against her abusive character towards her husband, Ikenna. They raise a fine and ask her to bring it the next day, unfailingly. In the morning of that day, no one knows Nkemdịrịm’s whereabouts, not even her husband, Ikenna. Nkemdịrịm packs her belongings very early in the morning, when people are still sleeping, and runs away from the house. *Umuokpu* liberated Ikenna from the oppressive strings of his marriage.

Ofomata shows the importance of *Umunna* (Kindred) and *Umuokpu* (Daughters of the clan/kindred) in Igbo society. They are involved in resolving family

disputes, especially domestic violence against men and/or women. In Igbo society, women are not expected to be aggressive. However, *Umuokpu* put some sanctions in place to admonish women and/or men against the act of domestic violence, which destroys family peace and harmony, and constitutes suffering for the children. *Umuokpu* are seen as the peace makers in Igbo society. They are respected, including their decisions in Igbo society. Their decisions concerning family disputes are made to maintain peace in the family.

7. Conclusion

Ofomata’s novel, *The Ojoo gbaa Afo...* (1999), whose full title is (*The Ojoo gbaa Afo, ọ diri onye metara ya*) (If evil lingers for a long time, it will torment the perpetrator), challenges traditional gender attitudes in Igbo society by presenting scenarios where men become victims of domestic violence at the hands of their wives. While the Igbo cultural belief presents men as aggressors and women as passive victims, the novel subverts the longstanding stereotypes about men, reflecting women as aggressors and perpetrators of domestic violence against men. The Igbo novel highlights how men, too, can suffer emotional, psychological, and even physical harm from their wives. By foregrounding these experiences, Ofomata not only critiques societal silence around male attack but also encourages a broader understanding of domestic violence as a gender-inclusive issue. The societal attitude that men are tough, aggressive, and oppressive, and solely perpetrators of domestic violence, and women are weak, reserved, non-aggressive, and solely victims of domestic violence, may make men feel that society will not take them seriously and show empathy and support if they report their wives’ violence toward them. They patiently keep mute and endure the violence against them without reporting for help to avoid social criticism, stigma, and shame it might cause them. Society often trivialises men’s experiences of domestic violence against them and overlooks the need to support them in coping with the trauma and ensure their psychological and emotional stability. Ikenna avoided sharing his family’s predicament with his family, colleagues, and friends due to societal stigma. He was reluctant to divorce his wife because he feared societal judgment about the durability of his marriage and decided to continue enduring his wife’s cantankerous behaviour towards him and continue to suffer damage to his sense of self. There is an urgent need to address the issue of domestic violence against men. This is because male violence has driven most men out of their families. It has also forced men into alcoholism, keeping late nights, depression, isolation, suicide, and,

in some other cases, untimely death, as shown in the Igbo novel. Ikenna lamented when his suffering of abuse from his wife was unbearable that God had abandoned him to die in his marriage. This kind of male abuse by his wife destabilizes peace and unity in the family. Women should embrace respect, negotiation, and dialogue as more efficient means to achieve success in relating with their husbands than aggression and confrontation. In the same manner, women ought to embody compassion, sensitivity, and proactive as they strive for justice and self-actualization. Aggression and abusive behaviour, whether in the form of verbal, emotional, physical, or psychological, in a relationship, cause deep harm and weaken the institution of marriage and family life. Women who act aggressively toward their husbands should recognise that abuse and disrespect toward their husbands are not signs of strength, but unhealthy destruction of family life and create untold hardship for both parties in the relationship, especially the children, who are the most vulnerable. Ikenna's wife, Nkemdiri, eventually ran away from the house following Umuokpu's confrontation; she suffers the consequences of her actions against her husband. Domestic violence against men should be unequivocally condemned or eliminated, just as violence against women, due to its detrimental effects on their emotional stability and economic well-being, undermining their overall quality of life. Women should be empowered by their husbands to acquire income-generating skills that will help them to support their families financially. Nkemdiri is inactive and does not contribute financially to the family. She expects Ikenna to fulfill all her requests, and anything short of that, she aggressively attacks him. Women's total dependence on their husbands for their needs can create unnecessary family issues. This does not imply that men should neglect their family responsibilities; women's financial support can solidify the family's well-being and ensure their participation in family decision-making, fostering love, harmony, and progress in the family.

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