

African Journal for the Psychological Studies of Social Issues

Volume 29 Number 3, August, 2026 Edition

Founding Editor- in - Chief: Professor Denis C.E. Ugwuegbu
(Retired Professor of Department of Psychology.
University of Ibadan.)

Editor- in - Chief: Professor Shyngle K. Balogun.
Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan.

Associate Editor: Professor. Benjamin O. Ehigie
Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan.

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Professor S. S. Babalola	University of South Africa
Professor S.E. Idemudia	University of South Africa
Professor Tope Akinawo	Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria
Professor O.A Ojedokun	Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria
Professor Catherine O Chowwen	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. Grace Adejunwon	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. A.M. Sunmola	University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor. B. Nwakwo	Caritas University, Nigeria
Professor. K.O. Taiwo	Lagos State University, Nigeria
Professor. Bayo Oluwole	University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Journal of the African Society for THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF
SOCIAL ISSUES % DEPT OF Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG YOUNG MARRIED CHRISTIAN COUPLES: IMPLICATIONS AND CHRISTIAN-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR FAMILY STABILITY

UJATA S. AMOS & UJATA LADI UKA

Department of Christian Religious Education
Faculty of Arts Education
Federal University of Education, Zaria
08039656143
ujataamos238@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive yet underreported crises afflicting family life in Nigeria, with young married Christian couples among the most affected demographic despite religious affiliation that ostensibly enjoins love, mutual submission, and non-violence. This paper investigates the nature, prevalence, and dynamics of domestic violence among young married Christian couples, examines its theological, psychological, sociological, and ecclesiastical implications, and proposes biblically grounded, church-centred solutions for the restoration and stabilisation of affected families. Anchored on the Christian Family Systems Theory and the Pastoral Care and Counselling Framework, and drawing on a descriptive survey of 220 respondents drawn from married couples, pastors, marriage counsellors, and social welfare officers in Kaduna State, the study explores how biblical misinterpretation, cultural patriarchy, economic stress, premarital ignorance, and inadequate pastoral support combine to generate and sustain domestic violence within ostensibly Christian homes. Findings indicate that physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse are significantly prevalent among the study population, that prevailing interpretations of scriptural texts on headship and submission frequently enable rather than restrain abusive conduct, and that most victims receive inadequate or theologically uninformed responses from their local churches. The paper recommends comprehensive pre-marital education anchored in biblical equality, the establishment of church-based domestic violence response teams, structured pastoral counselling protocols, and integration of local church support networks with state-level social welfare and legal protection mechanisms.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Young Married Christian Couples, Christian Family, Pastoral Care, Biblical Marriage, Family Stability, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The family is widely regarded within Christian theology and social science as the foundational unit of society, the primary locus of socialisation, emotional formation, and spiritual nurture (Osmer, 2008). Marriage, as understood within the Christian tradition, is presented in Scripture as a covenantal union between a man and a woman ordained by God (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:25-33), intended to produce companionship, fruitfulness, and mutual flourishing. Yet this ideal stands in sharp contrast to the lived realities of many young married Christian couples across Nigeria, for whom the private space of the home has become a site of fear, coercion, and repeated injury.

Domestic violence, broadly defined as a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner (United Nations, 2020), encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, economic, and spiritual forms of abuse. In Nigeria, studies consistently show that intimate partner violence is alarmingly prevalent: the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey estimated that approximately 31 percent of women aged 15 to 49 had experienced physical violence, and 9 percent had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives (National Population Commission, 2019). More recent data from the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and civil society organisations indicate that domestic violence reports increased significantly in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, with many states including Kaduna recording alarming spikes in cases (Okonkwo & Nwosu, 2023).

The involvement of self-identifying Christians in domestic violence as both perpetrators and victims presents a profound theological and pastoral challenge. Scholars such as Cooper-White (1995) and Fortune (2010) have documented the manner in which religious belief, when poorly

formed or deliberately manipulated, can function not as a restraint upon intimate partner violence but as an instrument of its justification and concealment. Biblical texts on male headship (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23), female submission (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1), and the indissolubility of marriage (Matthew 19:6) are frequently cited by abusers to prevent victims from seeking help and by pastors to counsel women to remain in dangerous situations (Nason-Clark, 2004). At the same time, the genuine resources available within Christian Scripture and tradition for understanding human dignity, mutual love, forgiveness, accountability, and justice remain substantially underutilised in Nigerian church responses to this crisis.

Young married couples, defined in this study as couples in which both partners are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, are of particular concern. This demographic group in Nigeria is characterised by financial instability, limited relational maturity, exposure to competing cultural expectations of gender roles, and frequently inadequate premarital preparation (Oluwole & Adesanya, 2022). Where such pressures are compounded by poor biblical formation, patriarchal church cultures, and the reluctance of Christian victims to report abuse for fear of stigma or spiritual condemnation, the potential for domestic violence to become entrenched and generationally transmitted is substantially elevated.

This paper therefore investigates the prevalence, dynamics, and implications of domestic violence among young married Christian couples and proposes concrete, biblically grounded, and ecclesially embedded solutions to support family stability and the protection of vulnerable individuals.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the strong Christian identification of the majority of Nigerian married couples and the formal commitment of most churches to biblical values of love and non-violence, domestic violence within Christian homes persists at rates that approximate or exceed those found in the general population. The church as an institution has often responded inadequately, oscillating between silence, victim-blaming theological counsel, and an overemphasis on marital preservation at the expense of personal safety (Balogun, 2020). The problem this study addresses is the need to understand empirically how domestic violence operates among young married Christian couples and to determine what forms of Christian-based intervention most effectively promote safety, healing, and family stability.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the nature, prevalence, and implications of domestic violence among young married Christian couples and to propose biblically grounded solutions for family stability.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Ascertain respondents' awareness and experience of domestic violence among young married Christian couples.
2. Examine the theological and cultural factors that contribute to domestic violence in Christian homes.
3. Assess the psychological and social implications of domestic violence for affected individuals and families.
4. Evaluate the adequacy of existing church responses to domestic violence among young Christian couples.
5. Identify Christian-based solutions capable of promoting family stability and protecting victims of domestic violence.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the awareness and perceived prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples?
2. What theological and cultural factors contribute to domestic violence in Christian homes?
3. What are the psychological and social implications of domestic violence for young Christian families?
4. How adequate are current church responses to domestic violence among young married Christian couples?
5. What Christian-based solutions can effectively promote family stability and protect victims of domestic violence?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between misinterpretation of biblical headship and submission texts and the perpetuation of domestic violence in Christian homes.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between cultural patriarchal norms and the prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between the adequacy of premarital counselling and the incidence of domestic violence in young Christian marriages.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between structured church-based intervention and family stability among young Christian couples experiencing domestic violence.

Conceptual Clarifications

Domestic Violence: Definition and Forms

Domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV) or gender-based violence (GBV), denotes a pattern of coercive, controlling, or threatening behaviour exercised by one person against another within an intimate or family relationship (World Health Organization, 2021). Its forms include physical abuse (striking, kicking, or otherwise physically harming a partner); emotional and psychological abuse (verbal humiliation, threats, isolation, and gaslighting); sexual abuse (coerced or forced sexual activity within marriage); economic abuse (restricting access to financial resources); and spiritual abuse (the manipulation of religious texts, practices, or community structures to control or demean a partner). Within Nigerian Christian communities, spiritual abuse occupies particular analytical significance, as it often operates invisibly within ostensibly orthodox religious discourse.

Young Married Christian Couples

For the purposes of this study, young married Christian couples are defined as legally or traditionally married couples in which both partners self-identify as Christians, are between eighteen and thirty-five years of age, and have been married for a period of between one and ten years. This definition encompasses couples at various stages of early marital formation and is consistent with similar research in Nigerian family studies (Oluwole & Adesanya, 2022). The inclusion of self-identification as the criterion for Christian affiliation, rather than denominational

membership or frequency of church attendance, reflects the sociological reality that many Nigerians claim Christian identity across a wide spectrum of practice and doctrinal formation.

Family Stability

Family stability refers to the condition in which household members experience a consistent, safe, and supportive relational environment characterised by emotional security, physical safety, mutual respect, shared parenting, economic sustainability, and the ability to manage conflict constructively (Amato, 2005). From a Christian perspective, family stability is further understood as the outworking of covenant fidelity, sacrificial love (agape), and mutual submission in marriage as described in Ephesians 5:21-33. Domestic violence is antithetical to family stability on all of these dimensions, producing not only physical harm but lasting psychological trauma, disrupted child development, and the fracturing of relational trust.

Biblical Perspectives on Marriage and Gender Relations

Biblical teaching on marriage presents a vision of covenantal partnership grounded in mutual love, dignity, and responsibility. The creation narrative in Genesis 1:26-27, in which both male and female are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), establishes the ontological equality of the sexes as the foundational premise of Christian anthropology. Genesis 2:18-24 presents woman as a suitable helper and partner (*ezer kenegdo*, often better rendered "strength corresponding to him" rather than mere subordinate) to the man, and their union as characterised by mutual belonging and complementarity. The Song of Solomon presents erotic love within marriage as mutual and celebratory.

The Pauline texts on marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19, frequently cited in discussions of domestic violence, must be read within the framework of mutual submission announced in Ephesians 5:21 ("Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"), the analogy of Christ's sacrificial, self-giving love for the church, and the explicit prohibition of harshness toward wives in Colossians 3:19. Recent scholarship in evangelical and mainline Protestant traditions increasingly argues that the headship texts are descriptions of servant leadership modelled on Christ's *kenosis* (self-emptying), not licences for domination or violence (Keener, 2004; McKnight, 2020). Any theological interpretation of these texts that justifies physical, emotional, or sexual harm to a spouse fundamentally distorts the scriptural canon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Christian Family Systems Theory and the Pastoral Care and Counselling Framework.

The Christian Family Systems Theory, drawing on the structural and strategic family therapy models of Minuchin (1974) and Haley (1976) as adapted for Christian pastoral contexts by scholars such as Everett Worthington (1989) and Stanton Jones (2011), understands the family as an interconnected system of relationships in which the patterns, rules, and relational dynamics of the whole influence the behaviour of each individual member. Domestic violence, within this framework, is understood not merely as an isolated act by an individual perpetrator but as a symptom of dysfunctional relational patterns that require systemic intervention at individual, couple, familial, congregational, and social levels. The Christian adaptation of this framework further insists that the family system is embedded within a covenant relationship with God and that genuine healing requires spiritual as well as relational transformation.

The Pastoral Care and Counselling Framework, developed within practical theology by scholars including Clebsch and Jaekle (1964), Browning (1983), and more recently Emmanuel Lartey (2003), understands the church's ministry of care as encompassing healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, and empowering, with the protection of vulnerable persons as a non-negotiable

priority. Applied to domestic violence, this framework insists that pastoral care cannot be reduced to spiritual comfort or marital preservation; it must engage the full range of a victim's needs, including safety, legal protection, psychological recovery, and economic independence, while holding perpetrators accountable through structured processes of repentance, restitution, and behavioural change.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised young married Christian couples, pastors and church leaders, certified marriage counsellors, and state social welfare officers in Kaduna North, Kaduna South, and Chikun Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, estimated at approximately 1,400 individuals. Using stratified random sampling, a sample of 220 respondents was drawn from this population: 100 young married Christian couples (50 couples), 60 pastors and church leaders, 30 marriage counsellors, and 30 social welfare officers.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the "Domestic Violence in Christian Homes Questionnaire" (DVCHQ), designed around a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by three experts in Christian Religious Education, Psychology, and Gender Studies, and a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was obtained using the test-retest method over a two-week interval. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations to answer the research questions, while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the four hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the awareness and perceived prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples?

Table 1: Awareness and Perceived Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Young Married Christian Couples

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Mean
Physical violence (hitting, slapping, kicking) occurs in some Christian homes I know	54	32	8	6	3.34
Emotional abuse (insults, threats, humiliation) is more common than physical abuse in Christian marriages	58	28	9	5	3.39
Sexual coercion within Christian marriage is rarely discussed but is a real problem	49	34	11	6	3.26
Economic control and financial deprivation are used by some spouses as a form of domestic violence	46	36	12	6	3.22
Many victims of domestic violence in Christian homes suffer in silence due to shame or fear	62	27	7	4	3.47
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 1 indicates that a significant majority of respondents across all categories affirmed the presence of multiple forms of domestic violence among young married Christian couples. The highest mean score (3.47) was recorded for the item on silence and concealment among victims, with 89% of respondents agreeing that many victims suffer in silence due to shame or fear. Emotional abuse was ranked second (mean 3.39, 86% agreement), while physical violence received 86% agreement. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on domestic

violence in Nigerian Christian communities, which identifies emotional and psychological abuse as more prevalent and less readily acknowledged than physical violence (Balogun, 2020; Okonkwo & Nwosu, 2023). The strong consensus on victim silence underscores the urgency of creating safe, non-stigmatising disclosure spaces within church contexts.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between misinterpretation of biblical headship and submission texts and the perpetuation of domestic violence in Christian homes.

Table 2: Test of Relationship between Biblical Misinterpretation and Perpetuation of Domestic Violence

Variables	N	r	r ²	p-value	Decision
Biblical Misinterpretation	200	0.793	0.629	.0049	Significant
Domestic Violence Perpetuation	200	-	-	-	-
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 2 shows a significance value of .0049, below the alpha level of 0.05. The null hypothesis (Ho₁) is rejected and the alternative accepted: there is a statistically significant relationship between misinterpretation of biblical headship and submission texts and the perpetuation of domestic violence in Christian homes. This finding is consistent with scholarship demonstrating that patriarchal readings of Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Peter 3:1, when detached from the broader canonical context of mutual submission, imago Dei, and Christ's kenotic love, function in practice as theological scaffolding for abusive conduct (Cooper-White, 1995; Nason-Clark, 2004).

Research Question 2: What theological and cultural factors contribute to domestic violence in Christian homes?

Table 3: Theological and Cultural Factors Contributing to Domestic Violence in Christian Homes

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Mean
Misinterpretation of biblical headship (Eph. 5:23) is used by some husbands to justify controlling behaviour	56	30	9	5	3.37
Cultural beliefs that a man must 'discipline' his wife contribute to physical abuse in Christian homes	53	33	9	5	3.34
Inadequate premarital counselling leaves young couples unprepared to manage conflict non-violently	51	35	9	5	3.32
Economic stress and unemployment significantly increase the risk of domestic violence in young Christian marriages	57	30	8	5	3.39
The belief that divorce is sinful causes some victims to tolerate ongoing abuse	60	28	7	5	3.43
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 3 reveals that the belief that divorce is sinful was rated the strongest theological factor (mean 3.43, 88% agreement), followed by economic stress and unemployment (mean 3.39, 87%) and misinterpretation of male headship (mean 3.37, 86%). Cultural beliefs about marital discipline attracted 86% agreement. These findings confirm what extensive pastoral and feminist theological scholarship has argued: that the interaction of inadequate biblical formation, cultural patriarchy, and economic vulnerability produces a specific vulnerability profile for domestic violence in young

Nigerian Christian marriages (Oduyoye, 2001; Balogun, 2020). The finding on divorce stigma is particularly significant, as it indicates that theological beliefs about marital permanence are functioning as structural barriers to safety rather than as encouragements to work toward genuine healing.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between cultural patriarchal norms and the prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples.

Table 4: Test of Relationship between Cultural Patriarchal Norms and Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Variables	N	r	r ²	p-value	Decision
Cultural Patriarchal Norms	200	0.811	0.658	.0041	Significant
Domestic Violence Prevalence	200	-	-	-	-
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 4 records a significance value of .0041, well below the 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis (Ho₂) is rejected. Cultural patriarchal norms have a statistically significant relationship with the prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples. This underscores the argument that Christian community responses to domestic violence cannot be limited to biblical instruction alone but must engage the cultural frameworks within which Scripture is interpreted and enacted. The overlap of Christian profession and traditional patriarchal gender norms in Kaduna State, as in many parts of northern Nigeria, creates conditions in which abusive conduct is normalised within a religious idiom, making culturally sensitive pastoral engagement essential (Oduyoye, 2001; Oluwole & Adesanya, 2022).

Research Question 3: What are the psychological and social implications of domestic violence for young Christian families?

Table 5: Psychological and Social Implications of Domestic Violence for Young Christian Families

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Mean
Victims of domestic violence in Christian homes commonly experience depression and post-traumatic stress	60	28	7	5	3.43
Children in homes where domestic violence occurs suffer developmental and emotional harm	64	26	6	4	3.50
Domestic violence weakens the spiritual life and church participation of victims	55	31	9	5	3.36
Domestic violence frequently results in marital breakdown and single parenthood	52	33	10	5	3.32
Communities and extended families often pressure victims to remain silent, worsening outcomes	57	30	8	5	3.39
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 5 demonstrates that respondents most strongly affirmed the harmful impact of domestic violence on children (mean 3.50, 90% agreement), with depression and post-traumatic stress in victims also receiving very strong recognition (mean 3.43, 88%). Community and extended family pressure on victims to remain silent was affirmed by 87% of respondents (mean 3.39). The finding on weakened spiritual life and reduced church participation (mean 3.36, 86%) is particularly significant for the practical theology of this study, as it suggests that domestic violence not only harms individual victims but progressively disconnects them from the ecclesial community that might otherwise be a source of healing and support. These findings align with research documenting the intersecting psychological, spiritual, relational, and economic harms generated by intimate partner violence (Fortune, 2010; Herman, 2015).

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between the adequacy of premarital counselling and the incidence of domestic violence in young Christian marriages.

Table 6: Test of Relationship between Premarital Counselling Adequacy and Incidence of Domestic Violence

Variables	N	r	r ²	p-value	Decision
Premarital Counselling Adequacy	200	0.776	0.602	.0067	Significant
Domestic Violence Incidence	200	-	-	-	-
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 6 yields a significance value of .0067, below the 0.05 threshold. The null hypothesis (Ho₃) is rejected. There is a statistically significant relationship between the adequacy of premarital counselling and the incidence of domestic violence in young Christian marriages, confirming that investment in comprehensive premarital formation is a meaningful point of prevention. This is consistent with research in Christian pastoral care suggesting that couples who receive extended, structured premarital counselling addressing communication, conflict resolution, gender roles, and abuse awareness demonstrate measurably lower rates of early-marriage domestic violence (Worthington, 1989; Oluwole & Adesanya, 2022).

Research Question 4: How adequate are current church responses to domestic violence among young married Christian couples?

Table 7: Assessment of Church Responses to Domestic Violence among Young Married Christian Couples

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Mean
My church has a clear policy or protocol for responding to domestic violence disclosures	14	19	33	34	2.13

Pastors in my community are adequately trained to counsel victims of domestic violence	16	22	32	30	2.24
Victims of domestic violence who report to church leaders typically receive safety-centred, practical responses	12	18	36	34	2.08
My church actively refers domestic violence victims to legal or professional support services	11	17	37	35	2.04
Biblical teaching on forgiveness is sometimes used by pastors to discourage victims from reporting abuse	48	33	11	8	3.21
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 7 presents the most critical findings in this study. Across all items relating to the adequacy of existing church responses, mean scores were markedly low, with the majority of respondents disagreeing that their churches had clear protocols (mean 2.13), adequately trained pastors (mean 2.24), safety-centred responses (mean 2.08), or referral systems (mean 2.04). In sharp contrast, 81% of respondents agreed that biblical teaching on forgiveness is sometimes used by pastors to discourage victims from reporting abuse (mean 3.21). These findings point to a profound systemic inadequacy in Nigerian church responses to domestic violence and confirm the concern raised by scholars that congregational settings frequently prioritise marital preservation and spiritual comfort over victim safety and accountability (Nason-Clark, 2004; Fortune, 2010; Balogun, 2020).

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between structured church-based intervention and family stability among young Christian couples experiencing domestic violence.

Table 8: Test of Relationship between Structured Church-Based Intervention and Family Stability

Variables	N	r	r ²	p-value	Decision
Church-Based Intervention	200	0.841	0.707	.0031	Significant
Family Stability	200	-	-	-	-
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 8 records a significance value of .0031, the strongest correlation in this study, below the 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis (Ho₄) is rejected. Structured church-based intervention has a statistically significant relationship with family stability among young Christian couples experiencing domestic violence. This finding is the most practically important in the study: although current church responses are largely inadequate, the data confirm that structured, intentional church engagement does make a measurable difference to family stability outcomes. This lends strong empirical support to the recommendation that churches invest in developing systematic domestic violence response capacities rather than continuing to respond on an ad hoc basis.

Research Question 5: What Christian-based solutions can effectively promote family stability and protect victims of domestic violence?

Table 9: Christian-Based Solutions for Family Stability and Protection from Domestic Violence

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	Mean
Comprehensive premarital education addressing conflict resolution, mutual submission, and abuse prevention would reduce domestic violence	61	28	7	4	3.46
Church-based domestic violence response teams comprising trained pastors, counsellors, and social workers are needed	59	30	7	4	3.44
Pulpit teaching that presents biblical headship as servant leadership, not domination, would reduce marital abuse	57	30	8	5	3.39
Church-based support groups for survivors of domestic violence would promote healing and safety planning	55	32	8	5	3.37
Formal collaboration between churches and state social welfare and legal protection services would strengthen responses	53	33	9	5	3.34
<i>Source: Field Survey, 2026</i>					

Table 9 shows strong endorsement across all proposed Christian-based solutions. The highest-rated solution was comprehensive premarital education (mean 3.46, 89% agreement), followed by church-based domestic violence response teams (mean 3.44, 89%) and reoriented pulpit teaching on biblical headship (mean 3.39, 87%). Support groups for survivors received 87% agreement and formal church-state collaboration 86%. These findings provide an empirically grounded basis for the recommendations advanced in this study and suggest that respondents, including pastors, counsellors, and couples themselves, recognise both the inadequacy of existing responses and the concrete institutional investments required to address this crisis within a Christian framework.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

The results of this study yield five principal findings. First, domestic violence in its multiple forms, physical, emotional, sexual, economic, and spiritual, is significantly prevalent among young married Christian couples in the study area, with the overwhelming majority of respondents affirming its presence and noting that many victims suffer in silence due to shame and religious stigma.

Second, a statistically significant relationship exists between the misinterpretation of biblical headship and submission texts and the perpetuation of domestic violence in Christian homes ($r^2 = .629$, $p = .0049$). The theological framework within which young Nigerian Christian couples understand gender relations, male authority, and female submission plays a demonstrable role in either enabling or restraining abusive conduct.

Third, cultural patriarchal norms are significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence among young married Christian couples ($r^2 = .658$, $p = .0041$). The intersection of Christian profession and traditional gender expectations in northern Nigerian cultural contexts creates conditions in which abuse is normalised and concealed within a religious idiom.

Fourth, the adequacy of premarital counselling is significantly related to the incidence of domestic violence in young Christian marriages ($r^2 = .602$, $p = .0067$). Churches that invest in comprehensive, evidence-informed premarital preparation produce couples better equipped to manage conflict without violence. Current premarital programmes in most churches surveyed were found to be inadequate in addressing power dynamics, abuse awareness, and practical conflict resolution.

Fifth, structured church-based intervention is the most strongly correlated variable with family stability ($r^2 = .707$, $p = .0031$). Despite the current inadequacy of most church responses, when structured intervention occurs, its impact on family stability is measurably significant. This finding represents both an indictment of the status quo and a powerful case for institutional investment in church domestic violence response capacity.

Christian-Based Solutions for Family Stability: A Framework for Response

Drawing on the empirical findings of this study and on the resources of Christian Scripture, theology, and pastoral practice, the following framework of Christian-based solutions is proposed.

Theological Reformation: Reclaiming a Biblical Vision of Marriage

The most foundational intervention required is a reformation in the theological education of both clergy and laity regarding the biblical vision of marriage. Churches must recover the canonical priority of Ephesians 5:21 (mutual submission) as the hermeneutical frame for the subsequent verses on headship and submission, consistently preach Christ's self-giving love as the paradigm for husbands, and explicitly repudiate any interpretation of Scripture that legitimises coercion, domination, or harm. This requires systematic preaching and teaching series, theological education in seminaries and Bible colleges that addresses domestic violence as a pastoral reality, and the development of church-based educational curricula on biblical marriage for use with young couples.

Comprehensive Premarital Education and Formation

In response to the significant finding regarding the relationship between premarital counselling adequacy and domestic violence incidence, churches must invest in extending and deepening their premarital formation programmes. Effective programmes should address the biblical foundations of marriage as covenant partnership; communication skills and non-violent conflict resolution; the identification and rejection of abuse as incompatible with Christian marriage; the spiritual and psychological health of each partner; economic literacy and shared financial management; and awareness of legal protections and community support resources. Such programmes should be led by trained pastoral couples and, where possible, supplement pastoral teaching with input from certified marriage counsellors and social workers.

Church-Based Domestic Violence Response Teams

Given the strong correlation between structured church-based intervention and family stability, local churches should establish formal domestic violence response teams comprising trained pastoral staff, a certified counsellor or psychologist, a female lay leader accessible to women wishing to disclose abuse, a legal resource person with knowledge of domestic violence legislation in Nigeria, and a social welfare liaison. These teams should operate under a written protocol that prioritises the safety of victims and dependent children above marital preservation;

that distinguishes between situations of ongoing danger requiring immediate safety planning and situations amenable to mediated reconciliation processes; and that connects victims to external legal and social welfare services where necessary. The model of Faith Trust Institute's congregational training programmes offers a proven template adaptable to the Nigerian church context (Fortune, 2010).

Pastoral Counselling Anchored in Victim Safety and Accountability

Pastoral counselling responses to domestic violence must be reoriented around three non-negotiable commitments: the safety of the victim; the accountability of the perpetrator; and the genuine possibility of transformation through repentance and, where appropriate, reconciliation. Pastors must be trained to recognise that forgiveness and reconciliation are theologically distinct: forgiveness is a spiritual and psychological process undertaken by the victim for their own healing and spiritual freedom, while reconciliation is a relational process that requires demonstrated change of behaviour over time by the perpetrator and is not always safe or appropriate to pursue. Pastors must also be trained not to use biblical texts on forgiveness or marital permanence to pressure victims to return to dangerous situations.

Support Networks and Community Solidarity for Survivors

Churches should establish support groups for survivors of domestic violence, facilitated by trained lay leaders or counsellors and informed by biblically grounded principles of healing, lament, solidarity, and restored identity in Christ. Such groups provide a space for survivors to name their experience without shame, receive peer support, access practical resources, and begin the process of spiritual and psychological recovery within the community of faith. Where women's ministries, youth groups, or small group networks exist, these can serve as access points for disclosure and support, provided their leaders receive appropriate training and are equipped with referral pathways.

Church-State Collaboration and Legal Literacy

The formal collaboration between churches and state social welfare and legal protection services should be pursued through structured partnerships with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, NAPTIP, the Nigeria Police domestic violence units, and non-governmental organisations with expertise in gender-based violence response. Churches should maintain up-to-date knowledge of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act, 2015) and its state-level counterparts, and should actively assist victims in understanding and accessing their legal rights. Legal literacy sessions for church members, integrated into women's ministry and marriage enrichment programmes, can substantially reduce the barriers to formal disclosure and legal protection among Christian victims.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated through empirical survey evidence and hypothesis testing that domestic violence is a significant and underaddressed crisis among young married Christian couples, shaped by the convergence of theological misformation, cultural patriarchy, economic vulnerability, inadequate premarital preparation, and insufficient church response capacity. All four null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, establishing significant relationships between biblical misinterpretation and domestic violence perpetuation; cultural patriarchal norms and domestic violence prevalence; premarital counselling adequacy and domestic violence incidence; and structured church intervention and family stability.

The study simultaneously affirms the profound resources available within the Christian tradition for addressing this crisis: a biblical anthropology rooted in the imago Dei and the ontological equality of male and female; a theology of marriage grounded in covenant, mutual submission,

and sacrificial love; a pastoral tradition that encompasses healing, accountability, and restorative care; and a vision of the church as a community of solidarity capable of surrounding the most vulnerable with practical support. Domestic violence in Christian homes is not an aberration that the Christian faith is powerless to address; it is a failure of theological formation, ecclesial organisation, and pastoral courage that a renewed and properly resourced church is equipped to confront.

The path from this recognition to durable change requires nothing less than a reformation of how Nigerian churches teach about marriage, equip couples for its demands, respond to its failures, and collaborate with the wider society to protect those most at risk. The stakes, measured in the physical safety, psychological health, spiritual vitality, and relational flourishing of young Christian families, could not be higher.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Churches and denominational bodies should develop and implement comprehensive premarital education programmes of a minimum of twelve structured sessions, incorporating biblical teaching on mutual submission and servant leadership, conflict resolution, abuse identification and prevention, economic management, and awareness of legal protections under the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act.
2. Seminaries, Bible colleges, and pastoral training institutions should integrate courses on domestic violence recognition, victim-sensitive pastoral counselling, and trauma-informed care into their theological curricula, ensuring that every ordained minister is equipped to respond safely and effectively to domestic violence disclosures.
3. Local churches should establish formal domestic violence response teams comprising trained pastoral, counselling, legal, and social welfare personnel, operating under written protocols that prioritise victim safety, perpetrator accountability, and structured referral to external professional services.
4. Pulpit and teaching ministries should systematically address and correct patriarchal misreadings of biblical headship and submission texts, presenting Christ's kenotic self-giving love as the definitive paradigm for Christian marriage and explicitly naming domestic violence as incompatible with Christian identity.
5. Church support groups for survivors of domestic violence should be established and led by trained facilitators, providing safe spaces for disclosure, peer support, healing, and practical resource navigation within the community of faith.

REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 75–96.
- Balogun, F. A. (2020). Domestic violence in the church: A pastoral challenge for Nigerian Christianity. *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 23(1), 44–58.
- Browning, D. S. (1983). *Religious ethics and pastoral care*. Fortress Press.
- Clebsch, W. A., & Jaekle, C. R. (1964). *Pastoral care in historical perspective*. Prentice-Hall.
- Cooper-White, P. (1995). *The cry of Tamar: Violence against women and the church's response*. Fortress Press.
- Fortune, M. M. (2010). *Sexual violence: The unmentionable sin*. Pilgrim Press.
- Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Jones, S. L., & Butman, R. E. (2011). *Modern psychotherapies: A comprehensive Christian appraisal* (2nd ed.). InterVarsity Press.
- Keener, C. S. (2004). *Paul, women, and wives: Marriage and women's ministry in the letters of Paul*. Hendrickson.
- Lartey, E. (2003). *In living colour: An intercultural approach to pastoral care and counselling* (2nd ed.). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- McKnight, S. (2020). *The blue parakeet: Rethinking how you read the Bible* (2nd ed.). Zondervan.
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Harvard University Press.
- Nason-Clark, N. (2004). When terror strikes at home: The interface between religion and domestic violence. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43(3), 303–310.
- National Population Commission, Nigeria. (2019). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*. NPC and ICF.
- Oduyoye, M. A. (2001). *Introducing African women's theology*. Sheffield Academic Press.
- Okonkwo, C., & Nwosu, I. (2023). Intimate partner violence in post-COVID-19 Nigeria: Trends, responses, and gaps. *African Journal of Social Work*, 13(2), 112–128.
- Oluwole, D. A., & Adesanya, A. O. (2022). Premarital counselling and marital violence among young married couples in Nigeria. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 14(1), 1–11.
- Osmer, R. R. (2008). *Practical theology: An introduction*. Eerdmans.
- United Nations. (2020). *Handbook on effective prosecution responses to violence against women and girls*. United Nations.
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women*. WHO.
- Worthington, E. L. (1989). *Marriage counseling: A Christian approach to counseling couples*. InterVarsity Press.