

Selected Demographic Variables and Elder Abuse in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria

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Abstract

The study aimed at identifying the relationship between selected demographic factors and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study consisted of all male and female elderly persons aged 70 years and above. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select a sample size of 5,600 elderly. A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages to answer the research questions, while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used in Hypotheses testing. Results revealed that emotional abuse was topmost form of abuse suffered by the elderly in the study, closely followed by financial and material abuse; and neglect and abandonment, while physical and sexual abuses were not common. The test of hypotheses revealed a low positive correlation between age, gender, marital, income level and emotional/ psychological, physical, sexual, and neglect/ abandonment of the elderly. The only exception was the relationship between income level and financial and material abuse, where no significant relationship was found. The study concluded that the problem of elder abuse was pervasive in Akwa Ibom State judging from the percentage reporting all forms of abuse. Based on the findings it was recommended that awareness campaigns be organised to inform the public on what constitutes abuse as most individuals are not aware that most of their actions and behaviours toward the elderly people constitute abuse. In addition, the state and federal governments should consider the institution of social security scheme for the elderly to improve their economic base, while laws protecting women's right especially widows should be formulated to ensure their safety as women have been found to suffer more abuse than men.

Keywords: Elderly, Abuse, Socio-Economic, Age, Abandonment, Care, Awareness

Introduction

Recent global reports reveal an ageing population, implying an increase in the proportion of older people aged, sixty-five and above. Population ageing may be due to

improved nutrition, declining infections, better standard of living, prospects in education, health care and biomedical technology (Nwabueze, 2001). Hurme (2002) opined that the changed and changing demographics around the world point to an increased potential for abuse.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2010) defined elder abuse as a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person. It encompasses any act of commission or omission that results in harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of an older adult (Sellas and Krouse, 2009). In Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular, elder abuse may include all shabby treatments of the elderly by young people and family members, such as verbal abuse, name calling, locking up in a room, treatment as a child, and not maintaining or supporting with money to eat. It may also include outright beatings, indecent touching, extortion of money, non visiting, denying access to grand children and cases of children declaring their parents witches amongst others (Ekot, 2012).

Shaefer (2005) revealed that around the world, there are more than 442 million people aged 65 and above, representing about 7 percent of the world's population. Today worldwide, there are around 600 million persons aged 60 years and above, and this total will double by 2025 and will reach virtually 2 billion by 2050 – the vast majority of them in the developing world (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2010). Nigeria being the most populous African country is not left out in the increase in the elderly population.

Atchley and Barusch (2004) maintained that because the aging population has grown significantly, the need for adult children to care for their parents has increased dramatically. Care giving consists of informal and unpaid care provided to a dependent person by family members, other relatives, or friends (Maiconis, 2003). Family members hold the responsibility of fulfilling filial obligations to the elderly by providing food, shelter, clothing, drugs and other necessities. Frail elderly in particular need assistance in carrying out activities of daily living. In many ways, the elderly becomes as dependent as a child does on their caregivers, financially, emotionally or physically, thus leaving a broad window for possible abuse (Jones, Kramar, & Peterson, 2010).

In Nigeria, majority of the elderly are solely cared for within the family since it is the traditional role of children to support their parents in old age. Sijuwade (2008) maintained that both in developing and developed countries, the elderly as well as their caregivers prefer that they be taken care within the family. Walker (2002) also confirms that, in most industrial and pre-industrial societies, the family has been the main providers of care to their elderly relatives. Since majority of the elderly in Nigeria are not institutionalized but live with family members, it is often assumed that they are well care for and not subjected to any form of abuse.

Sijuwade (2008) posited that to abuse, neglect and abandon the elderly are all typologies of poor quality care for the elderly. Sijuwade explained that in the case of abuse, the caregiver actively harms the elderly; in the case of neglect, the caregiver is passive, insensitive, lacks empathy and ignores the care of the elderly, while totally abdicating the responsibilities of taking care of the elderly constitute abandonment. Thus, it may seem that elder abuse in Nigeria most often occur in the context of care; since because of the level of poverty and other social factors in the country, many families are unable to fulfil filial responsibilities to elderly parents. Bonnie and Wallace (2003) maintain that failure by a caregiver to satisfy elders' basic needs or to protect the elder from harm constitute abuse or mistreatment.

Elder abuse could take many forms, including physical, financial, psychological, sexual abuse and neglect (WHO, 2010). Forms of abuse suffered by the elderly may depend on many factors such as age, level of dependency, and culture. Various research studies are inconsistent on the most common forms of abuse suffered by the elderly. Schofield, Reynolds, Mishra, Powers, and Dobson (2003) and Cohen, Levin, Gagin, and Friedman (2007) suggested that people aged 65 years and above were most likely to report psychological and financial abuse - non physical forms of abuse. Other studies also found emotional or psychological abuse to be the most commonly reported (Acierno, Hernandez-Tejada, Wendy – Muzzy, & Kenneth – Steve, 2009; Iborra, 2009; Laumann, Leitsch & Waite, 2009; Mowlam, Tennant, Dixon, & McCreadie, 2007). On the other hand, other studies found financial abuse to be the most common form (Dimah & Dimah, 2002; Repp & Hughess, 2005), still others found neglect to be the most common form of abuse (Dong, Simon, & Gorbien, 2007; O'keeffe, Hills, Doyle, McCreadie, Scholes, Tinker, Manthrope, Biggs, & Erens, 2007; Teaster, Dugar, Mendiondo, Abner, & Cecil, 2006). Sexual abuse is often identified as the least common form of abuse suffered by the elderly (Acierno *et al.*, 2009; Mowlam *et al.*, 2007). The perpetrator of abuse is usually a person the older adult loves, trusts, and depends on for care and assistance (Berk, 2001). Moreover, most often more than one type of abuse occurs at the same time for individuals.

Many socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income level, place of residence, etc, predispose the elderly to the risk of abuse. Many studies reveal that women are the most common victims and report abuse at higher rates than in men. Moreover, older women tend to live longer than men do and are more likely to be financially abused after their partner dies (Brozowski & Hall, 2004), and to be abused by a broader range of family members than men (Livermore, Bunt & Biscan, 2001). Majority of other studies on elder abuse also found that there were more female victims than male. For instance, Biggs, Manthorpe, Tinker, Doyle, and Erens (2009) in their study found that women were significantly (90%) more likely to have experienced mistreatment than men, but there were gender differences according to type of abuse and perpetrator characteristics. Acierno *et al.* (2009) also found that women were almost twice as often victims of abuse (63.2%) as men (36.8%).

Several studies show that a significant relationship exist between age and abuse (Soneja, 2001; Tsukada, Saito, & Tataru, 2001; Jamuna, 2003; Iborra, 2009). Kosberg (1988) discovered that the older the person is, the higher the risk of abusive or negligence situation, and the study Biggs *et al.* (2009) confirmed a high prevalence of abuse among the older age group. However, the study by Laumann *et al.* (2008), and Acierno *et al.* (2009) revealed that lower age (between 60 and 70 years) increased risk of physical, emotional, and stranger-perpetrated financial mistreatment of older adults; and that age was not related to increased or decreased risk of sexual abuse, financial mistreatment by family members, or neglect.

Marital status may also be a factor in elder abuse with widows/widowers suffering more cases of abuse, than their married counterparts. Madhurima (2008) observed that elderly widows are often denied access to or control over resources since women's inheritance rights are poorly established. He explained that their husband's resources including house, land and money are distributed among sons and that widowhood is usually accompanied by a loss of status. Biggs *et al.* (2009) also found that overall abuse varied by marital status.

Income level or socio-economic status of the elderly has been found to predispose some elderly persons to abuse. A study by Biggs *et al.* (2009) found that socioeconomic position was related to mistreatment, and Dong *et al.* (2007) in a study in china also supported

that lower income was associated with elder abuse. However, Acierno *et al.* (2009) found that lower income was predictive of physical and sexual mistreatment and neglect, but that income was not predictive of emotional abuse. Other variables such as living arrangement, physical dependency and many other social factors may contribute to elder abuse. For instance both clinical and research evidence suggests that a shared living situation is a major risk factor for elder mistreatment (abuse), with older persons living alone at the lowest risk (Peri, Fanslow, Hand & Parsons, 2008). A shared residence is known to increase the opportunities for contact and thus conflict and mistreatment (Bonnie & Wallace, 2003); but Choi, Kulick, & Mayer, (1999) found that the risk for financial abuse was increased for older people who lived alone.

According to WHO (2010), in many parts of the world, elder abuse occurs with little recognition or response, and until recently, this serious problem was hidden from the public view and considered mostly a private matter, but now evidence is accumulating to indicate that elder abuse is an important public health and societal problem. Most studies on elder abuse investigated prevalence rates especially in developed countries which have been found to range from 1percent-10 percent (WHO, 2010). Various studies in Nigeria indicate varied prevalence rates of abuse, for instance, Sijuwade (2008) in a study in Lagos found that 14 percent of the population experienced neglect and abandonment. Igbokwe and Asogwa (2010) in a study on the prevalence of abuse of the elderly in domestic setting in Enugu State however revealed a low prevalence of physical abuse, and a moderate prevalence of economic/financial exploitation and emotional abuse of the elderly in the area.

In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria the problem of elder abuse was hitherto generally viewed as a taboo and non-existence. People believed that the elderly are respected in the Nigerian society, well cared for in the family context; and therefore not exposed to abuse. However a study conducted in the state by Ekot (2012) revealed a high rate of abuse of the elderly. The study revealed abuse rate of 51.8% for emotional/psychological abuse, 47.3% for financial/material abuse, 39% for neglect/abandonment and 13.5% for physical abuse, 5.3% for sexual abuse during the past six months to one year preceding the study. Many familial and societal factors were identified as predicting elder abuse in the area. The association between specific demographic factors of elderly and experience of abuse was not considered, hence the need for this study. The study therefore aimed at establishing the relationship between selected demographic factors and abuse of the elderly in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to establish the association between selected demographic variables and abuse of the elderly in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. Specifically the study:

1. Determined the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in Akwa Ibom State
2. Identified forms of abuse common among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Established the relationship between selected demographic variables and abuse of the elderly in Akwa Ibom state.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What are the forms of abuse common among the elderly in Akwa Ibom state?

3. What is the relationship between selected demographic factors and abuse of the elderly in Akwa Ibom state?

Methodology

Research Design and Area of study

A survey research design was adopted for the study. The study area was Akwa Ibom State, one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria, located on the coastal south Eastern part of the country, lying between latitudes 4^o32'1" and 5^o33'1" North, and Longitudes 7^o25'1" and 8^o25'1" East of the Meridian. The State occupies a total landmass of 7245939Sqkm², bordered on the east by Cross River State, on the west by Rivers State, Abia State to the north and on the south by Atlantic Ocean. The state is a major crude oil producing state, comprising three major ethnic groups of Ibibio, Annang and Oron, with Ibibio language being the major spoken language, while the people are predominantly of the Christian faith, and a few practising native African religion (AK-SEEDS, 2004; Akwa Ibom State Investment Guide, 2008).

Population for the study

The population for the study consisted of all male and female elderly persons aged 70 years and above from two senatorial districts out of the three in Akwa Ibom State estimated to be about 56,000. This constitutes the "old-old", and the 'oldest old' (age 85 and older) segments of the elderly population in the state.

Sample for the study

Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select a sample size of 5,600 elderly which is 10% of the estimated population. In the first stage, two senatorial zones out of the three in Akwa Ibom State were randomly selected, and used for the study. The second stage involved proportionate distribution of the sample size into all the 21 local government areas that make up the selected senatorial zones based on their population. Twenty (20) villages including the local government headquarters were thereafter conveniently selected from each of the local government areas. The last stage involved accessible and snowball sampling of 5% of respondents from each of the selected villages to give the total of 5,600 respondents.

Instrument for data collection

A structured questionnaire was used for the study. The structured questionnaire contained two sections: Section A, was multiple choice questions designed to obtain socio demographic data from the elderly. Section B which was adapted and reviewed from Acierno *et al.* (2009) elicited information from the elderly with respect to the forms of abuse.

Data collection and Analyses Techniques

The researcher administered copies of the instrument with the help of 12 assistants, 10 of whom were primary health workers in different local government areas. The respondents were guided to complete and return the instrument on the spot, and administration of the instrument lasted 10 weeks. The researcher and assistants interpreted the questions into local dialect to non – literate and physically impaired respondents, and their responses were ticked in the appropriate columns in the instrument. Data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using frequency counts and percentages for research question 1(one) and 2(two), while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used for research question 3 and Hypotheses testing.

Results

The following findings were made:

- (1) Demographic characteristics of respondents (See Table 1)
- (2) Common forms of abuse among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State (See Table 2).
- (3) The relationship between selected demographic factors and abuse of the elderly in Akwa Ibom state? (See Table 3 – 6, Hypotheses 1- 4)

Table 1:
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Socio demographic characteristics

<i>S/ N</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Frequenc y</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
1.	Sex: Male	2558	47.7
	Female	3042	53.3
2.	Age: 70-74 years	2223	39.7
	75-79 years	2086	37.3
	80-Above years	1291	20.0
3.	Marital Status:		
	Married	1460	26.1
	Widow/widower	3263	58.3
	Divorced	662	11.8
	Never Married	215	3.8
4.	Number of Children:		
	None	336	6.0
	One	882	15.8
	Two	956	17.1
	Three	1456	26.0
	Four	1046	18.7
	Five or More	924	16.5
5.	Educational Level:		
	Cannot Read or Write	981	17.5
	FSLC	1130	20.2
	WASC/SSCE	1096	19.6
	Grade 2/NCE/Diploma	1138	20.3
	First Degree/HND	728	13.0
	Higher Qualification(M.Sc, Ph.D)	527	9.4
6.	Religion:		
	Christianity	5530	98.8
	Islam	-	-
	Traditional	70	1.2
7.	Means of Livelihood:		
	Working	360	6.4
	Retired with Pension	2220	39.6
	Retired without pension	561	10.0
	Income generating activities	986	16.0
	Not-Engaged	1563	28.0

8. Income level		
High Income	569	10.2
Medium Income	1148	20.5
Low Income	1516	27.1
Below poverty line	1079	19.3
Financially dependent	1288	23.0
9. Place of Residence (Locality):		
Urban	2757	49.2
Rural	2843	50.8
10. Living arrangement:		
Own home/Apartment	3527	63.0
Daughter's home	546	9.8
Son's home	701	12.5
Extended family compound,	560	10.0
Home of other relatives	266	4.7
11. Total number of people living in the household:		
Alone	364	6.5
2 People	1018	18.2
3 people	924	16.5
4 People	830	14.8
5 people or more	2464	44.0

Table 1 on socio demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed a fair selection of the respondents by gender (53.3% females; 47.7% males) and locality (49.2% urban; 50.8% rural). Out of these, 80% were between the ages of 70-79 years while 20% were above 80 years; 58.3% were either widows or widowers; 6.0% were without children and 6.5% lived all alone without any form of assistance. Also 28% were very financially dependent; 98.8% were Christians; 43.1% were heavily dependent physically on others; 63.0% lived in their own homes, while 37.0% of them resided in the homes of their children or other relatives.

Research Question 2

Table 2:

Frequency and Percentage distribution of the common forms of abuse experienced by the elderly in Akwa Ibom State

Forms of Abuse	Frequency	Percentage (%) **
Emotional/Psychological abuse		
<i>Sub – forms</i>		
Verbal attacks (scolding and yelling at)	3164	56.5
Humiliation/name calling	3164	56.5
Being ignored	2072	37.0
Harassment/coercion	1008	18.0
Witchcraft accusation or suspicion	2156	38.5
Physical Abuse		
<i>Sub – forms</i>		
Physical assault (hitting, slapping, etc).	1055	18.8
Restraining or locking up in the house	859	15.3
Injury (cuts, bruises or other marks)	817	14.6
Sexual Abuse		
<i>Sub – forms</i>		
Sexual Molestation (Kissing, fondling, etc)	420	7.5
Touching in a sexual way	532	9.5
Financial Abuse and material abuse		
<i>Sub - forms</i>		

Taking money or possessions	2320	41.4
Not making good decisions about elderly finances	2927	52.3
Being forced or tricked to bring out money	2282	40.8
Dispossession of land or other properties	714	12.8
Theft of food and foodstuff	1899	33.9

Neglect and Abandonment**Sub – forms**

Non regular visits	1788	31.9
Non provision of money for upkeep	2268	40.5
Lack of help with activities of daily living	1696	30.3
Neglect of medical needs	1788	31.9
Denial of access to grand children	2012	35.9
Lack of help in house care/ washing clothes	1704	30.4

** Multiple responses

Table 2 shows the different forms of abuse common among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State, with emotional abuse coming topmost, closely followed by financial/material abuse, and neglect/abandonment, while physical and sexual abuse are not very common.

Research Question 3 and hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One (Ho₁): There is no significant relationship between age and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3:

Summary of PPMCC analysis of scores on elders' age and emotional psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/ abandonment

Elder Characteristic	Statistics	Emotional/ Psychological Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Financial/ Material Abuse	Neglect and Abandonment
Age	Pearson Correlation	.11*	.13*	.03*	.06*	.23*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00
	N	5600	5600	5600	5600	5600

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

Table 3 with respect to the relationship between age and all forms of abuse shows that at 0.05 probability level, the calculated r values are statistically significant, as the calculated probability levels for all forms of abuse are less than 0.05 level in which the decision is based, revealing a low positive correlation between age and all forms of abuse (emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/ abandonment) of the elderly. With this observation, hypothesis one is rejected.

Hypothesis Two (Ho₂): There is no significant relationship between gender and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4:

Summary of PPMCC analysis of scores on elders' gender and emotional psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/ abandonment

Elder Characteristic	Statistics	Emotional/ Psychological Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Financial/ Material Abuse	Neglect and Abandonment
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.07*	.08*	.22*	.12*	.11*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	5600	5600	5600	5600	5600

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

Table 4 on the relationship between gender and all forms of abuse shows that at 0.05 probability level, the calculated r values are statistically significant, as the calculated probability levels for all forms of abuse are less than 0.05 level in which the decision is based, revealing a low positive correlation between gender and all forms of abuse (emotional/ psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/ abandonment) of the elderly. With this observation hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Hypothesis Three (Ho₃): There is no significant relationship between marital status and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5:

Summary of PPMCC analysis of scores on elders' Marital Status and emotional/psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/abandonment

Elder Characteristic	Statistics	Emotional/ Psychological Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Financial/ Material Abuse	Neglect and Abandonment
Marital Status	Pearson Correlation	.24*	.23*	.18*	.27*	.25*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	N	5600	5600	5600	5600	5600

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

Table 5 on the relationship between marital status and all forms of abuse shows that at 0.05 probability level, the calculated r values are statistically significant, as the calculated probability levels for all forms of abuse are less than 0.05 level in which the decision is based, revealing a low positive correlation between marital status and all forms of abuse (emotional/ psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/ abandonment) of the elderly. With this observation hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Hypothesis Four (Ho₄): There is no significant relationship between income level and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 6:

Summary of PPMCC analysis of scores on elders' socioeconomic level and emotional and psychological, physical, sexual, financial/material abuse, and neglect/abandonment

Elder Characteristic	Statistics	Emotional/ Psychological Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Financial/ Material Abuse	Neglect and Abandonment
Socioeconomic Level	Pearson Correlation	.20*	.07*	.11*	.00	.26*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.829	.000
	N	5600	5600	5600	5600	5600

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

Table 6 on the relationship between income level and all forms of abuse shows that at 0.05 probability level, the calculated r values are statistically significant, as the calculated probability levels for all forms of abuse excepting financial/material abuse are less than 0.05 level in which the decision is based, revealing a low positive correlation between income level and emotional/ psychological, physical, sexual, and neglect/ abandonment of the elderly. The only exception is the relationship between income level and financial and material abuse, where no significant relationship was found.

Discussion

The findings of the study in Table 1 revealed certain pathetic conditions of many elderly in the study such as the fact that 6.4% of them were still working, and involved in various economic activities in spite of their advanced ages. In addition, 19.3% were found to be below poverty level with 23.0% completely financially dependent, 43.1% being heavily physically dependent and needing assistance with activities of daily living, and the 6.5% living alone without any form of assistance. The revealing that many elderly live alone without assistance with activities of daily living is pathetic in this part of the World which hitherto practiced communal living and strong intergenerational relationships, coupled with the filial duty of children to parents in old age.

Results in Table 2 reveal that emotional/psychological abuse is the top-most form of abuse (56.5%) common among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State followed by financial/material abuse (52.3%), neglect/abandonment (40.5) and physical abuse (18.8), while sexual abuse was the least (9.5). These findings are consistent with Schofield *et al.* (2003) and Cohen *et al.* (2007) who maintained that people aged 65years and above are most likely to report psychological and financial abuse - non physical forms of abuse. The finding also lends credence to others which found emotional abuse to be the most commonly reported (Acierno, 2009; Iborra, 2009; Lauman *et al.*, 2009; Molam *et al.*, 2007). The finding is however inconsistent with others which found financial abuse to be the most common form (Dimah & Dimah, 2002; Repp & Hughess, 2005). The findings are also at variance with others which also found neglect to be the most common form of abuse (Dong *et al.*, 2007; O'keffee *et al.*, 2007; Teaster *et al.*, 2006). The finding that sexual abuse is the least common is in tandem with other studies which also revealed low rates of sexual abuse (Acierno *et al.*, 2009; Mowlam *et al.* (2007). The revelation that physical abuse is less common in the study is not surprising as there is a general belief on the lethal curses attached to physical attack on the elderly persons in the area. Many young people fear that the elderly might invoke curses on them, and especially women who they fear would 'beat their breasts' for such a young person who

would dare to inflict on them physical assaults, which is believed to result in calamity and untimely deaths.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between age and elder abuse in Akwa Ibom State, thus rejecting the null hypothesis (Table 3). In the study, age has been found to relate with all forms of abuse - emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial and material abuse, and neglect and abandonment. This implies that the risk of suffering abuse increased with age, meaning that the older adults in this study suffered more cases of abuse. This study corroborates others which also found a significant relationship between age and abuse (Soneja, 2001; Tsukada, 2001; Jamuna, 2003; Iborra, 2009). The study by Biggs *et al.* (2009) confirmed a high prevalence of abuse among the older age group, but Laumann *et al.* (2008), and Acierno *et al.* (2009) revealed that lower age (between 60 and 70 years) increased risk of physical, emotional, and stranger-perpetrated financial mistreatment of older adults; and that age was not related to increased or decreased risk of sexual abuse, financial mistreatment by family members, or neglect. The test of hypothesis 2 on the relationship between gender and elder abuse in the study revealed a significant relationship between gender and all forms of abuse - emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial/material abuse, and neglect/abandonment, of the elderly, thus rejecting the null hypothesis (Table 4). This reveals that women suffer more of the incidents of abuse in Akwa Ibom State. Women are the most common victims and report abuse at higher rates, and the severity of injury in women typically is greater than in men. Moreover older women tend to live longer than men do and are more likely to be financially abused after their partner dies (Brozowski and Hall, 2004), and to be abused by a broader range of family members than men (Livermore *et al.*, 2001). This finding lends credence to majority of other studies on elder abuse, which found that there were more female victims than male (Acierno *et al.*, 2009; Dong *et al.*, 2007). Biggs *et al.* (2009) in their study found that women were significantly (90%) more likely to have experienced mistreatment than men, but there were gender differences according to type of abuse and perpetrator characteristics

The findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between marital status and all forms of elder abuse - emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial/material and neglect/abandonment in the study area, thus rejecting the null hypothesis 3. This implies that being a widow/widower increases the risk for abuse, while married elderly suffer less abuse. Madhurima (2008) observed that elderly widows are often denied access to or control over resources since women's inheritance rights are poorly established, that their husband's resources including house, land and money are distributed among sons and that widowhood is usually accompanied by a loss of status. This finding is in line with that of Biggs *et al.* (2009) who found that overall abuse varied by marital status.

The results reveal that excepting for financial / material abuse; the elderly income level had significant relationship with emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial/material abuse and neglect and abandonment in Akwa Ibom State. This means that in the study, lower income predicts other forms of abuse - emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect and abandonment, but not predictive of financial/material abuse. This finding agrees with the findings by Biggs *et al.* (2009) which found that socioeconomic position was related to mistreatment. Dong *et al.* (2007) in a study in china supported that lower income was associated with elder abuse. However, Acierno *et al.* (2009) found that lower income was predictive of physical and sexual mistreatment and neglect, but that income was not predictive of emotional abuse.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the problem of elder abuse is pervasive in Akwa Ibom State judging from the percentage reporting all forms of abuse. Certain demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status and income level have been found to increase the risk of abuse in the area. Based on these, it recommended that awareness campaigns be organised to inform the public on the problem of elder abuse; with the aim of educating them on what constitutes abuse as most individuals are not aware that most of their actions and behaviours toward the elderly people constitute abuse. In addition, the state and federal governments should consider the institution of social security scheme for elderly to improve their economic base as lower socio-economic status has been found to increase the risk of abuse. Moreover, laws protecting women's right especially widows should be formulated to ensure their safety as women have been found to suffer more abuse than men.

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