



Religious Abuse Messaging and Effects on Married Couples in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The general public is progressively using messaging apps to create awareness as platforms for freedom of expression. Abuses in domestic settings are on the rise. This study aimed to examine the effects of Whatsapp religious abuse messages on knowledge and behavioral practices of married men and women in Lagos State, one of Nigeria's 36 states. The study took a quantitative approach, using the true-experimental design to assign respondents to the experimental and control groups randomly. Some 50 married men and 50 married women formed this research sample size and were selected purposively. A self-structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. Key findings revealed that women had more knowledge and understood religious abuse at the pre-intervention stage than men. They also engaged in less behavioral practices of religious abuse than men. Men's and women's knowledge and comprehension levels significantly increased at the post-intervention phase. In contrast, women engaged in behavioral practices of religious abuse than men. Therefore, one recommendation is that the media and government establish programs and laws on religious abuse in marriage. This move will create awareness, let people know when they are abused, and push for its eradication.

Keywords: Behavioural practices, comprehension, knowledge, married men, married women, religious abuse, WhatsApp

Introduction

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that permits people to relate and connect with friends, family, and strangers worldwide—established by Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009. The app is possibly the world's first instant messaging service. It is the most employed messaging application with over one billion monthly active users in over 180 countries (WhatsApp.com, 2018). Statista (2017) reports that 64 billion messages are sent daily on WhatsApp, and 1.6 billion photos are shared daily. Millions of online users cannot do without the social media (Amodu et al., 2020; Okorie et al., 2019; Morah & Omojola, 2018; Folaya et al., 2018; Morah, Omojola & Uzochukwu, 2016).

Rosenfeld, Sina et al. (2018) assert that it is the most widespread messaging network with the broadest user base and the most significant business support since its purchase by Facebook in 2014. Among other features, WhatsApp authorizes the establishment of groups by users, which involves an administrator adding other participants and permitting

notification alerts on a particular subject matter.

The utilization of WhatsApp is concerned with communicating information on religion, social concerns, economic affairs, education, entertainment, health benefits, business enterprise, and others. In religion, WhatsApp is used to pass information to members of a particular religious institution to attend specific programs and give access to the sharing of a preacher's sermon. Hoover (2012) asserts that the rise of social media with its open and accessible features will enable a collection of religious and spiritual views to be circulated.

WhatsApp is also a platform where social concerns are publicized, examined, and deliberated on. It supported a campaign titled *The 16 Days of Activism of no violence against women and children*. This program provided notification alerts for subscribers to have easy access to their fellow participants and assemble them for conferences regarding the campaign (Lembeth-Xulu, 2017). This study zeroed WhatsApp as a social media

interventionist archetype in controlling social vices, particularly religious abuse.

Religious abuse has various meanings, but in this study, the phrase is a spouse's act of using their religious beliefs to govern their significant other. Such acts prevent one from practicing religious doctrines and coercing one's spouse to follow one's religious beliefs or affiliations. It also involves imposing one's religion or denominations on the spouse, using spouses' beliefs to manipulate their actions, and employing religious teachings as a defense for control or violence.

Religious abuse involves preventing individuals from partaking in their religious activities or using one's religious view to influence, dominate or control another person (Adebayo, 2013).

Jantz (2015) asserts that religious abuse is a deliberate falsification of spiritual reasons for unspiritual motives. Such motives could be covetousness, exploitation, unfairness, or animosity. In a marriage, religious abuse uses one's belief to govern his/her spouse or prevent one from practicing their

religious doctrines. It could also be ridiculing the person's beliefs, employing religious teachings or cultural tradition as a defense for violence, and denying the individual access to their place of prayer or worship. In addition, Johnson and Van Vonderen (1991) note that an individual can be a victim and perpetrator at the same time. For instance, a woman can feel mistreated or abandoned by her husband. She has a concrete view towards scriptural authority in the home and simultaneously uses the scriptures to punish her children.

Moreover, religious abuse is a form of emotional abuse that occurs within the context of belief. In this case, victims may be deceived, humiliated, blamed, terrorized, belittled, neglected, and oppressed by their spouses who control them with their personal religious beliefs (CCPAS, 2015). Oakley and Kinmond (2013) submit:

that the "oppression and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context causes deep emotional attack like manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability,

ensorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, pressure to conform, misuse of scripture or the pulpit to control behavior, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position, isolation from others, especially those external to the abusive context" (p.21).

Supporting this view, Cochrane (2016) asserts that religious abuse damages the central core of people because it strikes the foundations of their lives. Abuse affects them physically, socially, emotionally, and even spiritually. According to Miles (2016), one in every four women in the world suffer some form of emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, or religious abuse from an intimate male partner in her lifetime.

In Nigeria, religious abuse is one of the most prevalent, cruel, and damaging types of abuse. However, due to the entrenched religious standpoint of the society, it is barely recognized as abuse which may account for the seemingly low number of "official" religious abuse cases. Moreover, people may be aware of their spouses' actions as

damaging because they tend to believe that the abuse is a norm, not because religious abuse has warmed its way into their psyche. Nonetheless, not recognizing what religious abuse sounds, looks, or feels like affects the mental and emotional state of the citizens and society at large.

Influence of Religion on Marriage

Like Nigeria, some husbands habit of controlling their wives in a patriarchal society based on Quran and Biblical assertions. Quranic verse Al-Baqarah 2:228 declares that *women have similar rights to men, but men have a degree above them.* Similarly, Ephesians 5:23 states that *the husband is the head of the wife ...,'* so *'Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet* (1Timothy 2:11-12). However, these scriptures do not permit men to subdue, influence, or manipulate their wives based on their understanding of the holy books. Instead, each stresses the need for communal love, integrity, respect,

and obligation for stability and peace to thrive.

Call and Heaton (1997) assert that religion and family institutions emphasize related principles and hinge on each to support socialization. Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1993) state that an individual's religious practice encompasses religious services, church denominational affiliation, and belief in religious teachings and personal spirituality. Thornton and Camburn (1989) further accentuate that denominational differences in teachings and practices concerning marriage serve as a form of guide for character and marital behavior. The selection of diverse churches or denominations between married persons could reflect their religious views rather than their personal beliefs, resulting in conflict as time goes on.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2005) establishes that commitment in marriage is to God and the spouse for Christians. Moreover, the Bible clearly states in 2Corinthians 6:14 that Christians should not be *“unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what partnership has*

righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” This verse suggests that when one decides to be attached to someone who does not walk in Christ or live according to God's will, abuse or conflict could emerge. Ojewole and Adegbenle (2017) argue that religious abuse occurs whether or not the couple shares the same beliefs. Some husbands are extremists who attack their wives in a conflict or disagreement that could cause damage.

An instance of this is Jehovah's Witness. They are known for rejecting blood transfusion based on their interpretation of Leviticus 17:12. This verse states that *‘no soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourners among you eat blood.’* A Jehovah's Witness refuses the treatment with or without her opinion or consent based on doctrine – a possible act of hegemony intertwined with religion.

Nonetheless, Matthew Henry, a minister and Bible commentator, explains Leviticus 17:12. The minister argues that the law against eating blood was ceremonial and is no longer in force. The blood of beasts is no longer the ransom, but

Christ's blood only; therefore, there is not now the reason for abstaining there then was. The blood is now allowed for the nourishment of our bodies; it is no longer appointed to make atonement for the soul.

Now the blood of Christ makes atonement really and effectually; therefore, we must have regard and not consider it as a common thing or treat it with indifference (biblehub.com).

Based on this submission, it is advisable for individuals to be conversant with the truth of the Bible rather than rely on their understanding. Corroborating this view is a scripture in 2Timothy 4:3-4, which declares that *a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will rather follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths*'.

The essence of people genuinely knowing and understanding their faiths or beliefs

in order to avoid religious abuse should not be understated because it eventually becomes a norm. If not curbed, it may continue to consume the populace. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of WhatsApp religious abuse messages on knowledge and behavioral practices of married men and women in the Lagos State of Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Reports on several forms of abuse are made daily through different media channels. However, religious abuse remains rare, yet it exists with adverse effects. In recent times, the most significant marriage factors have been the social, legal, and religious aspects. Christianity and Islam are the two main religions practiced intensely by the Nigerian public. These religions have proven influential in marriage because their followers tend to understand scriptural verses as a directive from their creators. They obey by using sacred assertions as a pilot for their lifestyle. In a male-controlled society like Nigeria, dominating women in marriage is sometimes grounded on scriptural affirmations

found in Al-Baqarah 2:228, Ephesians 5:23, or 1Timothy 2:11-12.

However, these scriptures do not verify the need to suppress or impel married women. They instead accentuate the need for mutual love, reverence, and commitment so amity can reign. Due to the entrenched religiosity and patriarchal structures in Nigerian society, the misuse of religion is regarded virtually as a norm that is just and appropriate. On this premise, it is difficult not to wonder if the media, which are the key channels through which the people's voice and religious abuse victims are heard, are doing enough. Hence, this study employed WhatsApp as a vehicle that permits married men and women to be enthusiastically involved in communication on religious abuse.

Research Objectives

1. Determine married men and women's knowledge of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention.
2. Ascertain married men and women's knowledge of

religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.

3. Find out married men and women's comprehension of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention.
4. Examine married men and women's comprehension of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.
5. Establish married men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention.
6. Discover married men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.

Research Questions

1. What is married men and women's knowledge of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention?
2. What is married men and women's knowledge of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention?

3. What is the extent to which married men and women comprehend religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention?
4. What is the extent to which married men and women comprehend religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention?
5. How do married men and women's behavioral practices reflect religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention?
6. How do married men and women's behavioral practices reflect religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention?

Research Hypotheses

The research has the following hypotheses:

H₁- There is a significant difference in married men and women's knowledge of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention,

H₂- There is a significant difference in married men and women's knowledge of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention,

H₃- There is a significant difference in married men and women's comprehension of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention,

H₄- There is a significant difference in married men and women's comprehension of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention,

H₅- There is a significant difference in married men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention; and

H₆- There is a significant difference in married men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.

Significance of the study

Religious abuse amongst married persons is common, but due to the patriarchal system in Nigeria and its latent nature, it has attracted the least attention. This study is therefore of significance to married men and women with the same or different beliefs. It will help them be open to their spouses' religious practices to avoid abusive religious systems and other forms of abuse.

This help is essential because religious abuse could lead to other abuses like emotional, physical, or verbal abuse. Clerics will also benefit from the study. It will help them know where they are deficient in their ministrations. This study's findings should enable them to preach the truth and the actual context of scripture or God's word. In addition, the media will be enlightened about the nature of religious abuse, thereby aiding their information, education, and entertainment responsibilities in this respect. The study should further prompt the government to establish, strengthen, and expand laws defining religious abuse within marriage. This statutory responsibility would indicate socially improper actions and fortify sanctions against perpetrators.

Methodology

The true-experimental pretest-posttest design, which permits randomization in allocating respondents to different groups, was adopted in this study. This design comprises the experimental and control groups. Subjects in the

experimental group are usually exposed to the intervention, while those in the control group are not. Since this was a comparative study between men and women, there were two experimental groups and two control groups: one experimental and control group for men each way. Married men and women who live in Lagos were randomly assigned to these two groups. Due to the inconsistencies of online statistics of married persons in Lagos State and the inability of marriage registries to give accurate data, the population of this study was non-finite. Nonetheless, Katz, Elmore, Wild and Lucan (2014) assert that the sample size of a non-finite population can be determined where:

$$N = \frac{(Z\alpha + Z\beta)^2 \cdot p(1-p)}{(d)^2}$$

N – Sample size

Z α - 1.96, which is a 95% confidence level to avoid Type I error

Z β - 0.84, which is 80% power to detect Type II error

p - 0.5, which is 50% the variance of the proportion

d² - 0.40 (90% - 50%) which is mean difference to be detected

$$N = \frac{(1.96 + 0.84)^2 \cdot 2 \cdot 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{(0.40)^2}$$

$$N = \frac{(1.96 + 0.84)^2 \times 2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{0.16}$$

$$N = 24.5_{25}$$

N= 25 subjects per group

Hence, the sample size of this study is 100 split into four groups - 25 men each in the WhatsApp experimental and control groups and 25 women each in the WhatsApp experimental and control groups. These participants were selected from Lagos State because the Domestic Violence Response Team (DSVRT) was first established to focus on intimate partner violence. According to the DSVRT coordinator, Vivour-Adeniyi (2018), amongst the twenty local government areas (LGAs) in Lagos State, Alimosho, Kosofe, Ikorodu, and Ikeja had the highest reports of abuse as of 2018.

For this reason, purposive sampling was adopted to select these four LGAs based on the high rate of abuse in the areas. In addition, the convenience sampling permitted the

researcher to distribute 100 copies of the questionnaire based on the availability of married men and women in the selected LGAs. The copies were taken to random offices and houses in the LGAs to enable the researchers to keep track of respondents selected for the study.

The inclusion criteria entailed married men and women, persons who had been married at some point, owning a WhatsApp account, and using the app at least twice a week. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria involved non-residential married men and women and inactive WhatsApp account. Married persons who met these conditions were asked for their WhatsApp numbers in Section A, number six of the questionnaire. With this, the researcher added them to experimental and control groups formed for the study.

The intervention process of this study involved four stages. The first stage entailed using text, pictures, audio, and videos tapes on religious abuse. The second stage involved administering copies of the questionnaire to the experimental and control groups of the study. This step helped test their rudimentary

knowledge and understanding of religious abuse and enable the researcher to make comparisons at the post-intervention phase. Stage 3 marked the commencement of the intervention application as religious abuse messages were disseminated via WhatsApp.

The intervention was in progress for four weeks (02/11/18 to 30/11/18). Religious abuse messages were conveyed to the WhatsApp experimental groups daily but not to the control groups. Subsequently, the post-test, which was the last phase, was carried out by distributing the exact copies of the questionnaire to the experimental

and control groups. The objective was to ascertain if the WhatsApp intervention affected the subjects' knowledge and behavioral practices of religious abuse.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data were retrieved from 88 participants (Men = 44; Women = 44) regarding determining the impact of WhatsApp religious abuse messages on knowledge, comprehension, and behavioral practices of married men and women in Lagos State, at pre and post-intervention.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable		Experimental Freq. (n)	Experimental %	Control f. (n)	Control %
Marital Status	Married	35	79.5	29	65.9
	Divorced	4	9.1	4	9.1
	Separated	3	6.8	6	13.6
	Widowed	2	4.5	5	11.4
	Total	44	100	44	100
Gender	Male	22	50.0	22	50.0
	Female	22	50.0	22	50.0
	Total	44	100	44	100
Social Media	WhatsApp	44	100	44	50.0

Table 1 shows that married participants dominated this study equally represented in both the experimental (male= 50%; female=50%) and control groups.

(Experimental, 79.5%; Control, 65.9%). Participants' gender was All the 44 respondents in each experimental and control group

Test of Hypotheses

H₁- There is a significant difference in men and women's knowledge of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention

Table 2: Descriptive and inferential statistics for the test of difference in men and women's knowledge of religious abuse before WhatsApp intervention

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Experimental	Knowledge of Religious Abuse	Male	22	44.3182	8.49306	1.81073	
		Female	22	57.7273	11.44004	2.43902	
		T	df	Sig	Difference		
		-4.414	42	0.000***	-13.40909		
Control	Knowledge of Religious Abuse	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
		Male	22	55.5455	8.65050	1.84429	
		Female	22	54.6818	10.79412	2.30131	
		T	df	Sig	Difference		
		0.293	42	0.771	0.86364		

Table 2 indicates that there was a significant difference in the experimental group of men and

women's knowledge of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention (t(42)= -4.414,

$p < 0.05$). In addition, the mean score for females in the experimental group was higher (57.73) than males (44.32); implying that females had better knowledge of religious abuse than males before the WhatsApp intervention. Consequently, the hypothesis was accepted.

For the control group, on the other hand, there was no significant difference in men's and women's knowledge of religious abuse ($t(42) = -0.293, p > 0.05$). However, the mean score shows that men (55.55) had a slightly better knowledge of religious abuse than women (54.68).

H2-There is a significant difference in men's and women's knowledge of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.

Table 3: Descriptive and inferential statistics for the test of difference in men and women’s knowledge of religious abuse after WhatsApp intervention.

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Experimental	Knowledge of Religious Abuse	Male	22	63.9091	9.33967	1.99122	
		Female	22	65.1818	7.17560	1.52984	
		T		df	Sig	Mean Difference	
			-0.507	42	0.615	-1.27273	
Control	Knowledge of Religious Abuse	Male	22	55.3636	8.23781	1.75631	
		Female	22	55.0000	10.69045	2.27921	
		T		df	Sig	Mean Difference	
			0.126	42	0.900	0.36364	

Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference in the experimental group of men and women's knowledge of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention ($t(42) = -0.507, p > 0.05$).

This report suggests that both male and female participants in the experimental group had a similar level of knowledge of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention. Therefore, the

hypothesis was rejected. Result for the control group shows that there was no significant difference in men

and women's knowledge of religious abuse ($t(42) = -0.126, p > 0.05$).

H₃- There is a significant difference in men and women's comprehension of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention

Table 4: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Test of Difference in Men and Women’s Comprehension of Religious Abuse before WhatsApp Intervention

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Experimental	Comprehension of Religious Abuse	Male	22	57.8636	12.48350	2.66149	
		Female	22	65.2273	5.95164	1.26889	
		T	df	Sig	Mean Difference		
			-2.497	42	0.017***	-7.36364	
Control	Comprehension of Religious Abuse	Male	22	58.4545	8.19249	1.74664	
		Female	22	59.0455	9.66327	2.06022	
		T	df	Sig	Mean Difference		
			-0.219	42	0.828	-.09091	

Table 4 depicts that there was a significant difference in the experimental group of men and women's comprehension of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention ($t(42) = -2.497, p < 0.05$). The mean score for females in the experimental group was higher

(65.22) than males (57.86), suggesting that females had a better comprehension of religious abuse than males before the WhatsApp intervention. Hence, the hypothesis was accepted. For the control group, there was no significant difference in men's and women's comprehension

of religious abuse ($t(42) = -0.219, p > 0.05$).

H₄- There is a significant difference in men and women's comprehension of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention

Table 5: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Test of Difference in Men and Women's Comprehension of Religious Abuse after WhatsApp Intervention

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Experimental	Comprehension of Religious Abuse	Male	22	29.0455	10.90425	2.32479	
		Female	22	26.4545	7.21590	1.53844	
		T	df	Sig	Mean Difference		
		0.929	42	0.358	2.59091		
Control	Comprehension of Religious Abuse	Male	22	58.1818	7.75602	1.65359	
		Female	22	58.2727	9.57766	2.04196	
		T	df	Sig	Mean Difference		
		-.035	42	.973	-.09091		

Table 5 shows that there was no significant difference in the experimental group of men and women's comprehension of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention ($t(42) = -0.358, p > 0.05$). This implies that both male and female participants in the experimental group had a similar

level of comprehension of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. Result for the control group shows that there was no significant difference in men and women's knowledge of religious abuse ($t(42) = -0.035, p > 0.05$).

H₅- There is a significant difference in men's and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention.

Table 6: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Test of Difference in Men and Women's Behavioural Practices of Religious Abuse before WhatsApp Intervention

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	<i>Behavioral Practices of Religious Abuse</i>	Male	22	47.1818	8.41561	1.79421
		Female	22	37.0455	9.69279	2.06651
			T	df	Sig	Mean Difference
			3.704	42	0.001***	10.13636
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	<i>Behavioral Practices of Religious Abuse</i>	Male	22	35.9091	8.72822	1.86086
		Female	22	35.2727	8.28183	1.76569
			T	df	Sig	Mean Difference
			0.248	42	0.805	0.63636

was higher (47.18) than females (37.045), suggesting that males

Table 6 indicates that there was a significant difference in the experimental group men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse before the WhatsApp intervention ($t(42) = -3.704, p < 0.05$). The mean score for males in the experimental group

before the intervention were engaged in some behavioral religious abuses than females. Consequently, the hypothesis was accepted. For the control group,

there was no significant difference in men's and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse ($t(42)=0.248, p>0.05$).

H₆- There is a significant difference in men's and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention.

Table 7: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Test of Difference in Men and Women’s Behavioural Practices of Religious Practices after WhatsApp Intervention

Group	Construct	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Experimental	Behavioral Practices of Religious Abuse	Male	22	26.5000	3.90055	0.83160	
		Female	22	28.8636	2.76535	0.58958	
		T	df	Sig	Difference		
		-2.319	37.853	0.026***	-2.36364		
		Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Control	Behavioral Practices of Religious Abuse	Male	22	35.8182	8.16868	1.74157	
		Female	22	35.5909	8.03954	1.71404	
		T	df	Sig	Difference		
		0.093	42	0.926	0.22727		

Table 7 shows that there was a significant difference in the experimental group of men and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse after the WhatsApp intervention ($t(38)= -2.319, p<0.05$).

The mean score for females in the experimental group was higher (28.86) than males’ (26.50), suggesting that females after the intervention were engaged in some

behavioral religious abuses than males. Consequently, the hypothesis was accepted. For the control group, there was no significant difference in men's and women's behavioral practices of religious abuse ($t(42)=0.248, p>0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

Hypotheses 1 and 2 tested a significant difference in men's and

women's knowledge of religious abuse before and after the WhatsApp intervention. In the experimental group (pre-intervention), women had more knowledge of religious abuse than men. There was no significant difference in men's and women's knowledge of religious abuse for the control group. After the intervention, men and women in the experimental group had parallel knowledge of religious abuse because they had been exposed to information on religious abuse through the WhatsApp platform. On the other hand, male and female participants in the control group took the same stand as the pre-intervention because they were not exposed to the intervention.

At the pre-intervention stage of this study, women had more knowledge of religious abuse, likely because they were usually the victims of such abuse and were more sensitive and attentive to abusive traits. On the other hand, men are considered the main perpetrators of religious abuse based on the entrenched patriarchal and religious systems in Nigerian society. For this reason, they are not perceptive about such issues. Their low awareness

confirms the claim that the public's deeply internalized religiosity and coercion of spouses to follow partners' religious beliefs/affiliations are not religious abuses. This upshot also justifies why there are minimal reported incidences by the victims and even the media.

Omotosho (2014) agrees that Nigerians' entrenched diverse religious beliefs have led to much violence. A continuous sense of disbelief between Christians and Muslims makes them work towards dominating one another. The religious division has affected society's political, economic, and social (marital) togetherness. This situation can be minimized through sincere inter-religious communication as it safeguards the knowledge of different religious practices. This communication should be conveyed with peace and respect for diverse customs (Princen, 1992 & Smock, 2007).

Accordingly, there was a shift at the post-intervention stage as compared to the pre-intervention. This development emerged because male and female participants were exposed to religious abuse messages on WhatsApp. This aided them in

having a better knowledge of the issue—indicating that the WhatsApp intervention on religious abuse messages was effective. According to Statista (2018), WhatsApp was one of the leading social networking sites (SNS) in Nigeria as of the third quarter of 2017. The use of such SNS has become widespread. They have become an effective and standard channel for both interpersonal and public communication in Nigeria and the world (Ezeah, Asogwa, Edogor & Obiorah, 2013).

The WhatsApp intervention in this study has once again proven effective as it has the power to create and sustain interpersonal communication and sensitize the public of religious abuse and gradually curb the menace. Tracy (2003) affirms that “in the information age, knowledge is everything” (p.152). In essence, to identify a thriving phenomenon as a problem; one must have knowledge that is borne out of information. Hence, the significance of having information to impart knowledge should not be understated. The reason is that male respondents had minimal knowledge, and females

had a fair knowledge of religious abuse. This trend continued until they were exposed to information on the WhatsApp intervention, which considerably increased their knowledge.

The third and fourth hypotheses also show that male and female experimental groups had a significant difference in the comprehension of religious abuse before the intervention, as women understood religious abuse more than men. On the other hand, the men's and women's control groups depicted no significant difference in comprehension of religious abuse. Afterward, the intervention was administered to both men and women in the experimental groups, which enabled them to have a better and similar level of comprehension of religious abuse. However, the control group maintained the same position before the intervention because they were not treated.

As male respondents had minimal knowledge of religious abuse, they also had low comprehension of the issue. Hirsch (2003) asserts that knowledge is required to attain comprehension as it helps to conclude to show

understanding. In other words, knowledge needs to be acquired before comprehension can be present. While Hirsch (2003) holds this position, Tracy (2003) acknowledges that information produces knowledge, and Troedson (2009) submits that comprehension is bred from experience. These assertions support the logic behind women in this study having knowledge of religion through information and then understanding it. In contrast, men had little or no information to inform their knowledge, thereby; leading to low comprehension of religious abuse.

Furthermore, male respondents in this study were not aware of religious abuse due to a lack of information. At the same time, they did not understand the problem because of existing patriarchal and religious practices in the Nigerian state. It is safe to assume that their experience of entrenched religiosity and patriarchy shaped their experiences to perceive religious abuse as a tradition or norm. Women, on the other hand, further understood religious abuse not only because of information that imparted their knowledge but due of the

notion that they are more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of abuse (Women's Aid, 2019). Hence the reasons they recognize religious abuse and understand it.

Adekoya, Adebayo and Ajilore (2019) argue that information can also impart comprehension as the religious abuse experiences regarded as a norm in Nigeria are latent information for people to understand when they are being abused. In summary, the underlining factor is the need for information to impart knowledge and comprehension of a phenomenon. Thus, information was the cause for an effective change in married men and women's knowledge and comprehension of religious abuse. At the pre-intervention stage, they had adequate and little knowledge and comprehension of the issue. However, after they were exposed to information through the WhatsApp intervention, they gained substantial knowledge and understanding of the problem.

Lastly, the test of hypotheses 5 and 6 indicated that men and women in the experimental group had a significant difference in their

behavioural practices of religious abuse at the pre-intervention phase. This is because men in this study were involved in some behavioral practices of religious abuse than women. Conversely, the male and female control groups showed no significant difference in behavioral practices of religious abuse. At the post-intervention phase, women in the experimental group were revealed to have engaged in some behavioral practices of religious abuse than men. In contrast, the control groups held on to their viewpoints.

Before the administration of the intervention, men displayed behavioral practices of religious abuse. This resulted from the lack of information that their knowledge and comprehension of religious abuse hindered the decoding of right and wrong actions. Adekoya *et al.* (2019) validate this claim by asserting that information has the power to alter future human conduct. Another reason for the initial conduct exhibited by the men in this study is the universal belief that men should dominate women. Manful, Appiah and Gyasi-Boadu (2016) note that domestic abuse in Africa is

connected to anticipated gender roles and is labeled as an expression of socially recognized behavior patterns that permit men to exert power over women. In Nigeria, patriarchy and religion are so deep-rooted in the culture of the people that it has a substantial effect on their social behavior and human relations (Adekoya *et al.*, 2019). Dyson, Cobb and Forman (1997) further state that religion is a social tradition in which people partake rather than personal search for understanding. This assertion explains why religious abuse exists as people choose to understand a particular aspect of the scripture but not thoroughly and contextually. Corroborating this view is a scripture in 2Timothy 4:3-4, which declares that “a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will rather follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths”. On this premise, the actions of a person based on the nature of their belief (spirituality) are different from what a person believes in (belief) and

what (s) he is required to practice (religion). The essence of people genuinely knowing and understanding their faiths or beliefs in order to avoid religious abuse should not be understated because it eventually becomes a norm. If not curbed, it may continue to consume the populace.

At the post-intervention stage, men reduced their behavioral practices of religious abuse while women became the main perpetrators. The reduction of some men perpetrating religious abuse resulted from the intervention that permitted them to decipher right and wrong conduct and know the basics and depths of religious abuse. In addition, due to several variances in behaviors between men and women abuse, interventions based on male representations of spousal abuse are likely not practical for many women. The victimization that women have experienced from their husbands is a significant contextual factor in understanding their drive for abuse (Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan & Snow, 2008).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Generally, this study concludes that the intervention for the control group was not adequate for knowledge, comprehension, and behavioral practices of religious abuse. The scores for knowledge of religious abuse for the experimental group at post-intervention were higher than the pre-intervention scores. This result suggests that the intervention for the experimental group for knowledge of religious abuse was effective.

Furthermore, the scores for comprehension of religious abuse for the experimental group at post-intervention were lower as expected than the pre-intervention scores, indicating that the intervention for the experimental group for comprehension of religious abuse was effective. This showed that participants' understanding of religious abuse improved after the intervention. The result for behavioral practices of religious abuse for the experimental group yielded a mean difference for the pre and post-intervention scores. This result shows that the intervention for the experimental group was effective for behavioral practices of religious abuse. This is because the behavioral

practices of religious abuse reduced after the intervention. Specifically, at the pre-intervention stage, men lacked knowledge and comprehension of religious abuse and engaged in behavioral practices of religious abuse. At the same time, women were just slightly better than men in these aspects. At the post-intervention stage, men and women had better and similar knowledge and comprehension of religious abuse. However, women turned out to engage more in behavioral practices of religious abuse than men.

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that married men understand their scriptural verses for what they are and not what they think it means. In contrast, married women should not allow their past negative experience to guide their future behavior, leading to more abuse. Both married men and women with different beliefs should be open to their spouses' religious practices to avoid abusive religious systems and other mistreatments. This is because religious abuse could lead to other abuses such as emotional/physical/verbal abuse,

inter-denominational and inter-religion conflicts in domestic and societal settings. Clerics should also ensure they preach the truth and the actual context of scripture and stop misleading adherents with their personal opinions.

Counselors should also take their cue to provide professional supervision to religious abuse victims as they need emotional, psychological, and religious guidance. The media should further drive the abolition of religious abuse and advocate for victims' rights through information, entertainment, and education to cut across all audience types. The government should establish, strengthen, and expand laws defining religious abuse within marriage. This would indicate socially improper actions and fortify sanctions against perpetrators. Subsequently, members of society should seek information to acquire knowledge and comprehension as they are highly significant and regarded as the primary source of influence.

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