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**Attachment Styles as Correlates of Domestic Abuse among Married Women in Rivers State:
Implications for Counselling**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated attachment styles as correlates of domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Three objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised the entire 645,641 married women in Rivers State. A sample size of 430 married women was drawn from the population using the stratified random sampling technique. The researcher developed two research instrument titled: "Attachment Styles Scale" (ASS) and "Domestic Abuse Scale" (DAS). These instruments were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling. The reliability coefficients of the instruments was determined through the test re-test method which yielded a reliability coefficient of $r=0.81$ for Personality Traits and Attachment Styles Scale and $r=.83$ for Domestic Abuse Scale. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson's product moment correlation. The findings of the study revealed that secured, anxious and avoidant have significant relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that: married women should strive to develop secured attachment with their partners through healthy communication, healthy autonomy, cohesion, collaboration and trust to mitigate domestic abuse among them and married women exhibiting symptoms of anxious attachment style should be reassured by counsellors and helped to resolve their deeply rooted fears to checkmate domestic abuse.

Keywords: *Personality Traits, Attachment Styles, Correlates, Domestic Abuse Married Women*

INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is one of the most deleterious forms of abuse in our contemporary society. It is a control or domination based maltreatment of a close person. Domestic abuse as a phenomenon of interest involves unjust use of domineering power to cause pains, harm or distress to a victim at home or in a supposed safe environment. To be concise, domestic abuse translates to the physical, emotional, sexual or financial mal-treatment or mistreatment of a male or female victim for the purpose of exercising control. Domestic abuse against women as espoused by Iwundu (2020) is one of the most pervasive and underreported global human rights issues. This form of abuse has serious implications for both the victims and society, cutting across all socio-economic, cultural, and national boundaries. Peterman (2020) disclosed that the projections of domestic abuse of women reflect alarming trends of rising rates and severe impacts, which call for global attention, intervention, and policy action.

Domestic abuse translates to any pattern of behaviour in a relationship used to gain or maintain control over another person. It can be conceived as a behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship. This has societal costs, including higher health care costs and the need for social support services (United Nations 2020); hence the need to embark on a study of this nature. Ordu (2022) opined that the prevalence of domestic abuse among married women may be linked to their attachment styles. Attachment styles as phenomenon of interest is a crucial concept in the sphere of Characterology and by extension Psychology. Attachment

styles encase cognition, attitude, self-esteem, emotion and intelligence. Attachment styles suffice as the generic name for all relatively stable and distinctive styles of thoughts, feelings, behaviour and emotional responses that characterize a person's adaptation to surrounding circumstances. Attachment styles refers to the unique and enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that distinguish individuals from one another. It encompasses a broad range of characteristics that influence how people perceive the world, interact with others, and respond to various situations.

The anxious attachment style is usually marked by feelings of apprehension and tension upon separation and re-union with a confidant. Married persons with this attachment style are often anxious about their partners availability. They may become overly dependent, displaying clinginess and difficulty exploring their environment. They often experience intense distress upon separation and may have difficulty being soothed upon reunion. This attachment style is linked to difficulties in emotional regulation and anxiety in relationships (Simpson, 2019).

The avoidant attachment style is often manifested via purposeful dissociation from a confidant. Married persons with an avoidant attachment style tend to avoid or ignore their partner and show little emotional expression. They rarely seek for comfort from their partner amidst distress and may not show strong preferences for them. This attachment style is often linked to early experiences of neglect or emotional unavailability from partners (Iwundu, 2020). To the best of the researcher's knowledge only few obsolete studies have been conducted on attachment styles and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. And this poses an impediment to the provision of contemporary research based therapeutic interventions geared towards tackling the correlates of present day domestic abuse in Rivers State. It was against this background that the researcher conducted the study.

Concept of Attachment Styles

Simpson (2020) disclosed that attachment styles refers to patterns, systems, formats or modalities of attachment. The term attachment refers to bond, intimacy, connection, association or linkage. It is that thing holding two or more persons together. In certain contexts, particularly in psychological or interpersonal dynamics, attachment is often employed or relied upon as a substitute for cohesion, which typically denotes a more structural or functional unity within a group or system. Rather than fostering genuine group harmony, shared values, or collaborative alignment (which are hallmarks of cohesion), relationships may be maintained primarily through strong individual attachments, such as personal loyalties or emotional dependencies. In such cases, the appearance of unity or togetherness is sustained not by collective purpose or mutual understanding, but by the strength of personal bonds between specific individuals. This can lead to fragile systems or groups where the absence or disruption of a key attachment figure undermines the overall stability, revealing the lack of deeper, cohesive integration. Iwundu (2020) submitted that attachment styles describe the ways individuals interact with significant others and reflect their emotional responses in relationships. These patterns, established in childhood, often persist into adulthood, affecting interpersonal dynamics and emotional regulation. The attachment styles explored in the study include; secured attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment.

Cassidy (2016) posited that anxious attachment is another attachment style under consideration in the study. As the name implies, it is an attachment style hinged on anxiety. Anxiety refers to a feeling of apprehension or tension in response to stress. It is a tensed reaction to a stressful stimuli. Anxious attachment is therefore marked by apprehension, suspicion, overwhelming attention and insecurity over the continuity of the relationship. Simpson (2020) found that attachment styles in adulthood can predict relationship satisfaction, conflict resolution styles, and even mental health outcomes. Securely attached adults generally report higher levels of satisfaction and intimacy in relationships, while those with insecure attachment styles tend to experience more stress and dissatisfaction in their romantic relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). . Additionally, attachment styles are not limited to romantic relationships. Dozier et al. (2018) demonstrated the role of attachment in friendships, work relationships, and even interactions with technology, where attachment behaviours such as seeking proximity or avoiding closeness can manifest in different contexts (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The growing body of literature highlights the clinical implications of attachment theory. For example, interventions aimed at fostering secure attachment, such as attachment-based therapy or trauma-informed care, have shown

promise in helping individuals with insecure attachment histories improve their emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships.

Relationship between Secured and Domestic Abuse among Married Women

Domestic abuse and an individual's sense of security in a marriage have a direct, inverse relationship: a lack of security and the presence of controlling behaviors or other risk factors significantly increase the likelihood and experience of domestic violence (Roberts, 2022). A secure relationship is built on mutual respect and shared power, while domestic abuse is a manifestation of power and control dynamics that inherently destroy a woman's physical, emotional, and financial security. Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Domestic violence is a serious issue in which the victims are most commonly women. It includes wide range of issues ranging from sexual, psychological, and physical acts used against adult and adolescent women by either current or former male intimate partners or other family members with more than one-third of women in the world facing physical and sexual violence, the lifetime prevalence of it ranges from 20% to 33% in different population surveys and settings across the world (Peterman, 2020).

The following points outline the specific relationship:

Insecurity as a Risk Factor for Abuse

Controlling Behaviors: Husbands who exhibit controlling behaviors (e.g., restricting movement, accusing infidelity, making all household decisions) make women feel insecure and are significantly more likely to perpetrate violence. Studies found that women with controlling husbands were up to nine times more likely to experience domestic violence.

Economic Dependence: A woman's economic dependence and lack of financial independence can make her feel less secure and more vulnerable, which is a major reason many women feel compelled to stay in abusive relationships. Financial security for women is a protective factor against abuse (Ordu, 2022).

Lack of Social Support: Women who lack emotional support from family members are at an increased risk of violence. Strong family and social support systems can be a protective factor, while isolation (a common tactic of abusers) increases vulnerability and insecurity.

Patriarchal Norms: Societal norms that support male dominance and female subordination contribute to an environment where women feel insecure and violence is accepted as normal or a "private matter" not to be reported.

Relationship between Anxious and Domestic Abuse among Married Women

Domestic abuse has a strong, positive, and causal relationship with anxiety among married women; it is a significant predictor and major cause of anxiety disorders. Women experiencing domestic violence (DV) are at a significantly higher risk of developing anxiety and other mental health issues compared to those who do not (Papalia, 2023). Domestic violence is a serious form of violence and abuse perpetrated by adults against their spouses. The majority of individuals consider physical abuse between spouses, such as hitting, slapping, and beating, to be domestic violence. Physical, emotional, sexual, social, and spiritual abuse are the five basic categories of abuse, according to the Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center. Domestic violence exists in all ethnic and racial communities around the world, and women are disproportionately the victims of domestic abuse.

In any culture, women have a major role in the family, and their emotional, physical, and social well-being is intimately linked to society's general well-being. For a healthy society, health service providers around the world place a high value on women's physical, mental, and reproductive health. In most nations around the world, women are abused and are the primary victims of domestic violence, according to a WHO report on violence and health. It was also discovered that women who had been abused by their partners had higher rates of depression, anxiety, and phobias than women who had not been abused. Abused women's physical and emotional health can be severely harmed by domestic violence. It also jeopardizes the victimized women's social, economic, spiritual, and emotional well-being, and it has the potential to damage the entire society (Ordu, 2022).

Relationship between Avoidant and Domestic Abuse among Married Women

Avoidant attachment in married women is significantly associated with domestic abuse dynamics, functioning as both a potential risk factor for victimization and a barrier to leaving the relationship. It also influences how women cope with the violence and their overall marital satisfaction (Roberts, 2022). It is important to differentiate between an attachment style and intentional abuse. An avoidant attachment style is a learned protective adaptation, not inherently abusive in itself. The behavior becomes abusive when it involves power, control, manipulation, or physical harm.

Avoidance coping strategies are associated with poorer mental health outcomes among women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV). However, the mediating role of avoidance coping in the relationships between IPV victimization and specific mental health and substance use problems has not been examined. A more detailed understanding of the role of avoidance coping is critical to developing and modifying interventions to improve women's health. Therefore, the present study aims to examine avoidance coping as a potential mediator of the relationships between different types of IPV victimization and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, drug and alcohol problems among a sample of women who both experience IPV victimization, and use IPV, in their current intimate relationships. Our study will fill three gaps in the existing literature: 1) Examine the association between multiple forms of IPV victimization simultaneously with avoidance coping, 2) examine psychological and sexual IPV victimization in addition to physical IPV victimization, and 3) extending this area of study to the more generalizable, and frequently understudied population of women experiencing bidirectional IPV (Papalia, 2023).

Avoidance coping is often conceptualized as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral efforts aimed at regulating distress and minimizing threat. Avoidance coping may include efforts to block distressing memories, rationalize one's distressing experiences, or denial by fantasy. Existing research clearly identifies negative long-term effects of utilizing avoidance coping strategies in response to negative life events such as IPV victimization (i.e., poorer mental health outcomes). However, avoidance coping strategies also function as a normative and self-reinforcing method of reducing distress associated with IPV victimization (Ordu, 2022). That is, avoidance coping strategies serve an immediate purpose by reducing distress and perception of threat, but may negatively influence one's daily functioning and treatment response.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a repeated or recurrent pattern of violating the rights of others via attacks, humiliation, intimidation, neglect or abandonment. It is called domestic abuse because it takes place in a homestead, residential building, lodge or accommodation. Domestic abuse is also known as home abuse or intimate partner abuse. Iwundu (2020) disclosed that domestic abuse, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), is a pervasive public health issue with far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities. Domestic abuse encompasses various forms of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual violence, typically occurring within a context of intimate relationships. The World Health Organization (2021) elucidated that domestic abuse is typically characterized by a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours used by one individual to gain power and control over another. The abusive behaviours may include physical violence (hitting, slapping, choking), sexual violence (rape, coercion), psychological abuse (threats, intimidation, humiliation), emotional abuse (constant criticism, belittling), and financial abuse (controlling access to resources). The term "domestic abuse" is often used interchangeably with intimate partner violence, though it can also extend to violence within family dynamics more broadly, including child and elder abuse. Cases of domestic abuse usually involve slapping, punching, choking, blowing, hitting, cursing, abusing, gaslighting, financial exploitation and lots more.

Statement of the Problem

Married women deserve to be respected and pampered in our society given their herculean marital roles as wives, mothers and home builders (to mention but a few). The challenges associated with such marital roles adjustment necessitate that they be accorded unconditional positive regard, empathy, emotional care and emotional support the world over. However, marriage is not a bed of roses. The researcher observed that lots of married women in Rivers State have become unfortunate victims of

incessant physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuses that not only debases their femininity and dignity but also plunges them into depression, aggression, mental delirium, substance use disorder, hallucination, alexithymia, dyssemia, squalor, quagmire and allied sociocultural barbed wire of remaining with an abusive husband which more often than not culminates into instability, insanity, deformity and untimely death as in the case of the renowned gospel singer Osinachi who lost her life to an abusive marriage (Abdullahi, 2022).

Two crucial variables that may be linked to the prevalence and inadvertent sustenance of domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State as envisaged by the researcher include the psychological make up of the married women and the way they bond with their spouses. The direction and dimension of such relationship as at the time that the researcher decided to embark on the study is opaque. The recent surge in domestic abuse among married women in the State characterized by wife battery, marital rape, body shaming and gaslighting stirred the researcher's curiosity to wonder and ponder over how such variables may be linked to domestic abuse.

The researcher envisage that the impulsive and insulting behavioural manifestations associated with personality traits such as extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism among married women in Rivers State may be linked to the deleterious trend of domestic abuse in the State. Concomitantly, attachment styles such as secured attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment as envisaged by the researcher can foster the culture of silence and tolerance of domestic abuse that predisposes the victims to avoidable sufferings and existential crises such as pain, guilt and death. However, these have not been empirically determined as to act upon them. The challenge of the study therefore was to investigate personality traits, attachment styles and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine personality traits and attachment styles as they relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Specifically, the study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To find out the relationship between secured and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State;
2. To ascertain the relationship between anxious and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State;
3. To examine the relationship between avoidant and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State;

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between secured and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between anxious and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between avoidant and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses testable at 0.05 level of significance further guided the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between secured and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between anxious and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant relationship between avoidant and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a correlational research design. As the name implies, correlational research design is concerned with the relationship, association, connection or interaction between two or more variables. The population of the study comprised the entire 645,641 married women in Rivers State. Most of the married women were aged 18 and above and they cut across the lower, middle and upper socio economic status (Demographic and Health Survey, 2025). The sample size for the study, as determined using Taro Yamane’s formula was 400. However, to enhance the representativeness of the population, the sample size was increased to 430 married women. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw the sample from the population. The instruments for data collection were two researcher developed rating scales titled: “Attachment Styles Scale” (ASS) and "Domestic Abuse Scale” (DAS). Attachment Styles Scale was made up of sections A and B. The instruments were administered to the married persons in Rivers State using the direct delivery and retrieval method. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson's product moment correlation. The analysis was done with the aid of the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). The choice level of significance was the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What is the relationship between secured and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Four: One is no significant relationship between secured and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Secured Attachment and Domestic Abuse

		Correlations	
		Secured Attachment	Domestic Abuse
Secured Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	-.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson Correlation	-.554*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question one as indicated in Table 1 above shows how secured (attachment style) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the table revealed that (secured attachment style) had a moderate negative relationship ($r = -.554$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that secured attachment is associated with a moderate decrease in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis one as indicated in Table 1 above shows that the relationship between secured (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as the calculated p-value of .000 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between secured (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between secured attachment style and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between anxious and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between anxious (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 2 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Anxious Attachment Style and Domestic Abuse

		Correlation	
		Anxious Attachment	Domestic Abuse
Anxious Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson Correlation	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question five as indicated in Table 2 above shows how anxious (attachment style) relates to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the table revealed that (anxious attachment style) had a moderate positive relationship ($r = .401$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that anxious attachment is associated with a moderate increase in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis two as indicated in Table 2 above shows that the relationship between anxious (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as the calculated p-value of .003 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between anxious (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between anxious attachment style and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between avoidant and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between avoidant and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 3 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Avoidant Attachment Style and Domestic Abuse

		Correlations	
		Avoidant Attachment	Domestic Abuse
Avoidant Attachment	Pearson Correlation	1	.231**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson Correlation	.231**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question three as indicated in Table 3 above shows how avoidant (attachment style) relates to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the

table revealed that (avoidant attachment style) had a low positive relationship ($r = .231$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that avoidant attachment is associated with a low increase in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis three as indicated in Table 3 above shows that the relationship between avoidant (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as the calculated p-value of .000 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between avoidant (attachment style) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Secured Attachment and Domestic Abuse

The results of research question four and hypothesis four revealed that secured attachment style had a significant moderate negative relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. This shows that secured attachment helps in no small way to reduce domestic abuse. This could be attributed to its healthy dynamics such as mutual respect, cohesion and trust. The result consolidates the findings of Kenneth et al. (2018) which indicated evidence supporting positive results from attachment security priming with potential for addressing domestic violence via: diminished fear reactions, improved creative problem-solving, reduced psychological pain, persistence in managing uncomfortable feelings, more positive relationship expectations, less attachment anxiety, and modulation of threat-related amygdala reactivity. Furthermore, the result of the study agrees with the findings of Khodaei and Rahimi (2023) which revealed that the relationship between secure attachment style and domestic violence was negative and significant, while the relationship between insecure/anxious and ambivalent attachment styles with domestic violence was positive and significant.

Anxious Attachment and Domestic Abuse

The results of research question five and hypothesis five revealed that anxious attachment style had a significant moderate positive relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. This is a clear indicator that women with anxious attachment are difficult to deal with in a romantic relationship such as marriage. They are usually clingy but full of pretense. Women with anxious attachment often send mixed signals to the man of the house which can trigger confusion and aggression. The result agrees with the findings of Bond and Bond (2004) which revealed that an anxious attachment style was a significant predictor of females being victims of violence and of men not being victims. The result equally agrees with the findings of Papalia and Widom (2023) which revealed that attachment anxiety appeared to mediate paths between neglect and physical abuse and later violence.

Avoidant Attachment and Domestic Abuse

The result of research question six revealed that avoidant attachment style had a low positive relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. While avoidant attachment is associated with reduced domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State, it may not be in their best interest as it can predispose them to passive-aggressive tendencies given that it rarely allows healthy communication to take place. The result is in line with the findings of Kuijpers et al. (2021) which revealed that avoidant attachment style is a strong predictor of domestic violence. Furthermore, the result agrees with the findings of Mohammadi and Spencer (2024) which revealed that sexual IPV victimization was related to both avoidant attachment ($\beta = .229, p = .015$) and anxious attachment ($\beta = .245, p = .008$).

CONCLUSION

Personality traits and attachment styles are instrumental to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What manifest as domestic abuse among the married women is significantly linked to neuroticism, psychoticism and extraversion. These personality traits make the married women

susceptible to depression howbeit dynamically. Whereas extraversion had a significant moderate positive relationship with domestic abuse, neuroticism and psychoticism had significant high positive relationship with domestic abuse. Concomitantly, disorganized attachment styles, anxious attachment styles and avoidant attachment are all significantly related to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Furthermore, secured attachment has a significant negative relationship with marital adjustment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended as follows:

1. Married women should strive to develop secured attachment with their partners through healthy communication, healthy autonomy, cohesion, collaboration and trust to mitigate domestic abuse among them.
2. Married women exhibiting symptoms of anxious attachment style should be reassured by counsellors and helped to resolve their deeply rooted fears to checkmate domestic abuse.
3. Married women with avoidant attachment style should be assisted by counsellors to co-operate and collaborate with their partners and significant others using invitro and invivo exposure therapy for reduced domestic abuse.

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