

# The Portrayal of Domestic Violence Against Men in Nollywood Movies

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## Abstract

*Domestic violence is an issue of global concern that threatens the peace of every society, thus this paper has grounded its analysis on both genders as victims, unlike many discourses that focus on women as victims thereby neglecting the male counterparts. The problem of this study dwells on the inadequate and one-sided portrayals of domestic violence Nollywood films which often project women as sole victims of domestic violence. The findings suggest that men go through domestic violence but stigma and fear of being called weaklings prevents them from reporting. The research recommends that with the spate of violence in the society, this is the time Nigerian filmmakers should project more issues on domestic violence with the aim of condemning such acts and encouraging peaceful harmonious existence between couples.*

**Keywords:** *Domestic, Violence, Nollywood, Intersectionality, Representation, Media*

## Introduction

Domestic violence is a major and ongoing social problem in the world, and affects genders, all cultures as well as people of socioeconomic levels. This malady is mostly considered to affecting women; however, research has begun to uncover the experiences of male victims.

According to Hines and Douglas (4), domestic violence is caused by power dynamics and control, with societal structures and stereotypes determining who is seen and supported as a victim. Research on masculinity and health in Nigeria reveals a complex interplay between traditional gender norms and evolving perceptions. While societal expectations often support male resilience and stigmatize vulnerability (Onwuka and Onebunne 13). Often, these men in abusive relationship, be it marriage or courtship, endure serious social shame, that leaves them totally secluded with no support system to assist in addressing the abusive they experienced

The Nigeria's film industry, Nollywood, been one of the most influential and biggest industry in the country, has long been associated with the production of cultural and topical discourses. These movies, according to Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah (3), while entertaining, also deal with everyday issues, including

the different forms of domestic violence, at home and in marriage, and have been received by diverse audiences across the country as they appeal to their day-day life struggles.

As an accountability mission, Nollywood tries to educate the public and encourage social change in the sphere of gender-based violence (Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah 5). However, despite Nollywood's success in tackling domestic violence, its portrayals are usually showcasing women as the primary victims, and this goes to show the marginalization of male victims of domestic violence. Dienye and Gbeneol (334) highlight that in domestic violence, man is culturally assumed as the aggressor and the victim a female. Most films on domestic violence tend to focus on women victimization, which further reveals men as perpetrators rather than being seen as victims too. *Emily's Chronicle*, for example, showcased a nuanced portrayal of male victimization. Kenneth, the film's lead, endured domestic abuse, reflecting an apparent conversation that recognizes the kind of psychological and physical effects men may also experience in abusive relationship. This study analyzes *Emily's Chronicle* through the lens of Intersectionality Theory, a framework increasingly applied in recent research to understand how multiple social identities intersect to shape individuals' lived experiences, particularly in contexts of oppression and vulnerability (Crenshaw 13; Davis 9). Intersectionality Theory reveals the unique challenges faced by male victims of domestic violence within the intersection of cultural norms, gender expectations, and societal pressures, thereby shedding light to the ways Nollywood films can both display and challenge these norms. By exploring how intersecting identities impact male victimization, this paper aims to expand the conversation on domestic violence in Nigerian society, advocating for Nollywood to foster a more inclusive and informed discourse that recognizes and empathizes with all victims of abuse.

### **Conceptualization of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a serious, widespread issue that affects individuals regardless of gender, socioeconomic background, or cultural identity. Domestic violence continues to be a hideous global social problem (Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah 22). It is commonly defined as abusive behavior within a family or intimate relationship that is used to gain power and control over another person. This abuse can be in various forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, and economic harm. Scholars have increasingly emphasized that domestic violence is not confined to physical assault but encompasses behaviors intended to intimidate, manipulate, or isolate the victim (Hines & Douglas, 11).

One of the most frequent forms of domestic violence is physical abuse, involving actions such as hitting, slapping, and battering. Current research, however, shows that emotional control and psychological manipulation, which are forms of non-physical abuse, can equally have severe effects on victims. Dienye and Gbeneol (336), point out that emotional abuse such as prohibiting the victim, or dominating can have

critical psychological aftermath, like low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. These non-physical abuses often leave no trace outwardly and are extremely dangerous, hence making it especially difficult to identify by others.

Another serious form of abuse that makes it difficult for a victim to grow into independence and quit the relationship is Economic abuse, according to Johnson Laura (297), Economic abuse is a form of intimate partner violence that involves controlling, exploiting, or sabotaging a partner's economic resources. This abuse tactic promotes economic dependency and isolation, making it difficult for victims to leave abusive relationships (Johnson et al 298). The occurrence of domestic violence in Nigeria is rooted in the structure of the society, greatly determined by cultural beliefs and gender roles. Generally, the society expects men to embody physical and emotional strength and dominance, which often times leaves little to no room for vulnerability. Recent studies have demonstrated that males are often discouraged from expressing vulnerability, as a result of conventional masculine norms, thereby having severe impact on their mental health, hindering efforts to achieve gender equality (Croft et al. 42). Men frequently suppress vulnerability during conflicts due to cultural, relational, and individual factors, reinforcing a toxic culture of masculinity (Durón Delfín and Leach 179).

Speaking up is particularly difficult for male victims or seeking for help because of these societal expectations of masculinity and cultural stigma, as many are afraid that speaking up or sharing their experiences may make them appear weak or “unmanly” (McLeod et al. 1399).

According to the research by Dienye and Gbeneol (334), men are mostly silenced by the stigma and societal expectation, hence the inability to report abuse. They could feel compelled to suffer their pain in silence, thinking it is their responsibility to deal with or prevent such circumstances alone, without assistance. Men are expected by society to face attack head-on, like lions, presuming they are capable of self-defense. males are experiencing emotional pain because of the growing number of reports depicting women as predators and males as prey.

In a study conducted by Dienye and Gbeneol, (334) at the General Outpatient Department of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, out of a total of 48 victims of domestic violence were identified of which 5 (10.4%) were males.

Scholarly discussions recently have progressively employed Intersectionality Theory to examine how intersecting identities such as cultural background, social status, and gender impact experiences of domestic violence.

### **Nollywood Films and Portrayals of Domestic Violence**

Nollywood, Nigeria's film industry, has become a significant platform for addressing social issues, but its portrayal of gender roles and domestic violence remains complex. While some films advocate for women's

empowerment to combat domestic violence (Azunwo and Kalio 101), others reveal that men also experience psychological violence in relationships. Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah (7) note that many of these depictions are intended to reflect and create social awareness. These films are indeed very appealing and popular among the Nigerian audience as they portray realities such as abusive marriages to women suffering in a male dominated family system (Utoh-Ezeajugh and Anijah 3).

In the past, the focus of Nollywood the movie industry in Nigeria has been on showcasing how women bear the anguish of marital abuse. This pattern is consistent with other available evidence that shows that women are more often seen as victims at the hands of men who are viewed as the main aggressors (Dienye & Gbeneol, 336). These portrayals might further widen the simplistic view of domestic violence by accentuating and overlooking the reality of men as victims. For that reason, Nollywood has done a good job in bringing the suffering of abused women to the forefront, but has at the same time contributed to the misperceptions around domestic violence, which is a multi-faceted issue, by mostly focusing on women as the victims.

Nollywood productions are starting to show an understanding of the necessity to represent domestic violence in a more nuanced manner. Films such as *Emily's Chronicle*, which is the focus of this research, has begun to follow this trend as it examines domestic violence from a male victim's angle

### **Analysis of Domestic Violence as Portrayed in *Emily's Chronicle***

In *Emily's Chronicle*, one can appreciate how unconventional a film about domestic violence can be. This film manages to capture the attention of the audience by showing a male character, Kenneth, who is the sole focus of the film's domestic abuse. Not only does 'Kenneth' face the entire spectrum of abuse, both emotional as well as physical, he is also faced with deeply rooted issues that the society tries to impose on him. Feminist filmmakers have always blamed men for the acts of violence that take place in households. This movie, through the story told Kenneth, shatters this notion by revealing that women can be predators of domestic violence too, just like men. *Emily's Chronicle* was analyzed through Intersectionality Theory to explain the intersection of masculinity and domestic violence against men perpetrated by women.

### **Character Analysis**

#### ***Emily's Character***

Emily is crafted as a multi-faceted character whose possible abusive personality is explained as being a product of a traumatic past. The film implies that Emily was raised in an environment where domestic

violence was condoned and thus suffered from her father's abusive behavior towards her mother. This prompted Emily to feel a certain degree of hatred against men in general, which is later depicted to affect her relationship with Kenneth, who she later on manipulates, controls, and physically abuses. Using the framework of Intersectionality Theory, we are able to comprehend that Emily's ethnicity, position in society, and her background all come together to shape her attitudes. In a male-dominated society, perhaps her determination to succeed and the unwillingness to submit in her relationship is an outcome of trauma.



*Emily narrating her story to the priest.*

**EMILY:** I blame my father for everything. He violated my mother in every way and at night, he pounded her no different way you pound yam.

Watching this violent act triggered Emily's hatred towards men and of course she became a perpetrator of the same act that killed her mother. Children growing up in abusive homes learn this act, Emily swore never to be like her mother who was weak and couldn't defend herself.

**EMILY:** From that day, I swore never to be like my mother. I swore never to listen to society, and I swore never to be a victim of domestic violence. She was weak and I am powerful.

From that statement above, one could tell that her mind was already made up. The issue of domestic violence is a serious malady that anyone involved should seek counselling. Emily took her destiny and justice into her hands instead of seeking help. She became hostile towards everyone and did her best to become successful in other not to have a reason to depend on men. She became independent, famous and even a model to young girls. The world could only see the surface and not the true picture of who she really was. Behind all this success and popularity lies a damaged heart, a heart crying out for revenge.

In a society where successful single ladies, especially the ones approaching 40 years of age, are being questioned about their singlehood. Same was the case of Emily. Regardless of the wealth, success and popularity, people began to question her personality and moral stance. It was during the heat of this period that Kenneth, a course mate of Emily and a die-hard wooer way back in high school comes to her company

in search of a job. From the moment they saw each other, Emily could tell that he still felt something for her. Being very crafty and calculative, she employed him and soon after, asked him to marry her. This was of course a well-planned move by Emily to shut out the incessant questions about her marital status. Hence, Kenneth was only a tool for her to gain more social acceptance.

### ***Kenneth's Character***

Kenneth's character is central to *Emily's Chronicle's* portrayal of domestic violence. As a male victim, Kenneth endures emotional degradation, isolation, and manipulation, which progressively erode his self-esteem and mental health. Through Kenneth, the film explores how cultural norms and societal expectations around masculinity complicate his experience as a victim. Nigerian society typically views men as strong, self-sufficient figures; thus, Kenneth's suffering is not only physical and psychological but also deeply tied to the stigma of appearing "weak" or vulnerable. Dienne and Gbeneol (336) highlight that many male victims of domestic violence in Nigeria face additional obstacles in seeking help due to societal stigma, a reality that Kenneth's character embodies. Intersectional Theory sheds light on how Kenneth's gender and cultural environment intersect, constraining him from acknowledging or speaking out about his abuse, which ultimately exacerbates his isolation.

**PRIEST:** How come he couldn't see through you?

**EMILY:** Like I said, men in love lose their sight and reasoning. He was like complete fool just like every other man out there.

**PRIEST:** And he didn't hit you back?

**EMILY:** Not once. Such a sweet man. He swept, washed dishes, washed my cars, he believed I would change.

**PRIEST:** But you didn't change until...

**EMILY:** I didn't mean to. It was an accident.

**PRIEST:** Ok tell me about this accident

Victims of domestic violence have a way of thinking that the perpetrator would change. Kenneth the victim here refuses to leave, he believed he could change her, he was blinded by love and like every other victim, he refused to speak up, he was unsure about what people would say about him and how they would call him a weakling. He continued to be a loving husband to her until that fateful day when the monster in her broke the chains of bondage within her and Kenneth was murdered.



### *The murder scene of Kennedy*

According to her, she didn't mean to kill him, while she got physical with him as usual, the face of her father kept appearing on Kennedy 's face. Seeing the image of her father, she remembered all he did to her mother, she lost her cool and hit him hard so badly until he became lifeless.



### *Emily in shock as it dawned on her that she just murdered Kennedy*

The film sends a powerful social message, challenging audiences to reconsider biases that view men as “invulnerable” to abuse. By doing so, Emily's Chronicle encourages empathy toward male victims and expands the understanding of domestic violence as an issue that transcends gender stereotypes.



Intersectionality Theory allows for a deeper understanding of the layered experiences of Emily and Kenneth. In the film, Emily's actions are influenced by intersecting factors: her traumatic past, societal pressures, and her position as a successful woman in a patriarchal culture. These intersections contribute to her desire to control Kenneth, reflecting her need to resist subordination. Meanwhile, Kenneth's experience as a male victim is shaped by the expectations that Nigerian society places on men. The stigma associated with male vulnerability means that Kenneth suffers in silence, unable to find support due to intersecting pressures of masculinity and cultural norms around male strength. Crenshaw (310) explains that intersecting identities, such as gender and cultural expectations, can shape how individuals experience oppression. In *Emily's Chronicle*, these intersecting identities illuminate the complexities of both perpetrating and suffering from domestic violence, making the film a nuanced exploration of abuse beyond traditional narratives.

### **Conclusion**

Domestic violence is a global issue, and deeply impacts individuals in a multitude of manners, some which are associated with deeper psychological trauma. This study set out to investigate the depiction of domestic violence against men in Nollywood movies, using *Emily's Chronicle* as a point of focus. After viewing the movie and analyzing it through the Intersectionality theory, it was learned that Nollywood has the means to change the societal narratives around domestic violence, by changing the stereotypes that have been traditionally associated with it.

*Emily's Chronicle* shifted the focus to Kenneth, the male victim, and shows everything that goes through the man psychologically, emotionally, and physically. This alteration not only introduces new concepts to the subject of abuse but also challenges how a society such as Nigeria that is male dominant stereotypes abuse and differs from traditional perception of man as being powerful and dominant.

Moving forward, there is a need for Nollywood filmmakers to broaden their scope towards domestic violence related narratives and depict these stories in other unexplored genders such as male victimization and evaluate other factors inflicted through domestic violence. Rather than focus on single gender issues during domestic violence, Nollywood can widen its range of stories that need to be told and bring in education and insight into how empathy, justice, and equity should be shown towards all infected by domestic violence. This way the industry can bolster its efforts towards eliminating stigmas surrounding domestic violence, raising awareness, and creating actionable solutions, making it an active agent and tool for social change.



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