





Pattern and Demographic Determinants of Romantic Jealousy among Adults in Nigeria

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Quantitative Study

Abstract

Background: Jealousy in a romantic relationship contributes to other factors that could either sustain or destroy that relationship. There has been an increasing trend in the rate of broken relationships, marriage, and courtships, which is contrary to historical and cultural antecedents in a multicultural environment like Nigeria. This study was conducted with the aim to assess the patterns and demographic determinants of romantic jealousy among adults

Methods: This cross-sectional study was performed on a purposefully selected sample of 229 people aged between 24 and 63 years living in Delta State, Nigeria. The participants responded to the Multidimensional (Romantic) Jealousy Scale (MJS) short form in February 2022. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sociodemographic variables and inferential statistics (t-test for independent samples, and one-way ANOVA) were used to determine bivariate and multivariate associations.

Results: Gender differences were observed in the prevalence of the various forms of romantic jealousy. The prevalence of cognitive romantic jealousy in men was 81.7% while it was 76.8% in women [$t(227) = -2.14; P < 0.05$]. The prevalence emotional jealousy among men and women was, respectively, 79.8% and 82.4% [$t(227) = -0.10, P > 0.05$]. Moreover, the prevalence of behavioural jealousy among men and women was, respectively, 87.5% and 88% [$t(227) = -2.94, P < 0.01$].

Conclusion: This study demonstrated a high prevalence of romantic jealousy among adults in Delta state, Nigeria, with significant gender variation in the cognitive and behavioural domains. Further studies and a larger sample are required to assess the impact of personality and culture on romantic jealousy.

Keywords: Romantic jealousy; Relationships; Marriage

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Introduction

Jealousy in romantic relationships contributes to other factors that could either sustain or destroy it. Recent evidence shows an increasing trend in the rate of broken relationships, marriage and courtships, (Paul, 2019) which is contrary to the historical and cultural antecedents in a multicultural environment like Nigeria. There is compelling evidence of abusive relationships (Chiweta-Oduah, Arinze-Umobi, & Chukwu, 2020; Omoniyi, 2023) which have led to frequent sensitization with the intent to curb domestic violence (Omidoyin, 2018). Since jealousy has been associated with aggression and violence, there are strong indications that romantic jealousy could be associated with the experience of aggressive behaviours towards romantic rivals and may contribute to intimate partner violence. In addition, a heightened level of romantic jealousy has drastic consequences for the couple involved and the rivals, even to the point of death (Attridge, 2013; Martínez-León & Peña, 2017). It is therefore becoming a concern for public health and societal wellbeing.

Romantic jealousy has been widely researched (Kara & Deniz, 2021; Pichon, Treves-Kagan, Stern, Kyegombe, Stockl, & Buller, 2020; Uzun, 2019). Although it is justified by its strength in harmonizing relationships through a conscious increase in care and concern, its excess remains a problem that could be pathological. This necessitates continuous research on related factors that could be strong determinants. The factors considered in the present study include gender, family type, and occupation. Jealousy generally refers to the thoughts or feelings of insecurity, fear, and concern over a relative lack of possession. It can consist of one or more emotions such as anger, resentment, inadequacy, helplessness, or disgust. Jealousy is a typical experience in human relationships, and it has been observed in infants as young as 5 months (Draghi-Lorenz, 2000; Hart & Carrington, 2002; Hart, Carrington, Tronick, & Carroll, 2004). Some researchers claim that jealousy is seen in all cultures and is a universal trait (Buss, 2000; Buss, 2001). However, others claim that jealousy is a culture-specific emotion (Salovey, 1991).

Romantic jealousy is defined as a set of thoughts, feelings, and actions that threaten the existence or quality of a relationship, and are generated by the perception of a potential romantic attraction between the partner and a real or imaginary rival (Salovey, 1991; White, 1981). Romantic relationships are a significant part of human lives. Healthy relationships increase our life satisfaction and psychological well-being, supporting us against the dangerous effects of stress (Kawamichi et al., 2016; Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017; Love & Holder, 2016). healthy relationship have a variety of positive outcomes such as companionship, passion, and intimacy (Gable & Impett, 2012). Unfortunately, romantic relationships can also be a source of great sorrow and suffering. Jealousy, rejection, abandonment, and conflict in a relationship may result in psychological distress and emotional pain. In fact, problems in romantic relationships may lead to the emergence of or exacerbation of existing psychopathological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Gable & Impett, 2012).

Although jealousy is a normal emotion and can be an important component of healthy relationships, when it is abnormal in terms of intensity, persistence, and lack of insight, it may become pathological (Marazziti et al., 2003), especially when the symptoms are not noticed on time and it has not received appropriate attention by way of treatment. Jealousy is composed of the 3 components of thoughts (cognitive), feelings (emotional), and coping. White (1981) theorizes that the cognitive component of jealousy occurs when the person becomes aware of a threat to a valued romantic relationship. Negative emotions follow the realization of such a threat, and finally,

the individual engages in coping strategies designed to deal with the threats, thereby reducing the negative emotional components (White, 1981).

Over the years, the perpetuation of violence in relationships has been ascribed more to males than females (Karakurt, Koc, Cetinsaya, Ayluctarhan, & Bolen, 2019; McCarthy, Mehta, & Haberland, 2018). Documentations on domestic violence among women show that 10%-35% experience abuse at some point in their lives of their life. Studies have revealed that about 35% of women experience violence from their intimate partners. Although, there have been equivocal findings on sex differences in romantic jealousy since the dimension of jealousy displayed by men differs from women (Uthman, Lawoko, & Moradi, 2009).

Numerous studies have been conducted on experiences of violence by women; however, recent occurrences in Nigeria have shown that men also experience intimate partner violence, which could be because of a perceived real or presumed threat to their relationship (romantic jealousy). There are numerous cases of women killing their husbands for infidelity (Guardian, 2015; Punch, 2023), and in one report a woman killed her husband because he had knowledge of her infidelity (Vanguardngr, 2023). The identified cases of abuse could be ascribed to morbid romantic jealousy, which was not managed early enough. This study was conducted with the aim to assess the patterns and demographic determinants of romantic jealousy among adults.

Methods

Participants: This cross-sectional study was conducted on a purposefully selected sample of 229 people aged between 24 and 63 years (mean \pm SD: 36.99 \pm 7.447) and living in Delta State, Nigeria. From among all the local government areas (LGAs) in Delta State, 2 local government areas were randomly selected. A list of institutions with a staff size larger than 50 was obtained from the revenue department of both LGAs. From this list, 3 institutions were randomly selected, Guinness Nigeria PLC, Central Hospital, and Brightfield International School. At each institution, after obtaining permission from their management, personnel who volunteered being in a relationship at the time of the study were invited to participate in the study. We used a prevalence rate of 50% at 90% power, and estimated a sample size of 200 individuals as the minimum sample size for this study.

The inclusion criteria included being in a relationship at the time of the study, and providing an informed consent. We excluded those who had previously been married, but are now widowed.

Instruments

Sociodemographic characteristics form: This form included 4 items that collected data on gender (female/male), age (years), occupation, and family type.

Multidimensional (Romantic) Jealousy Scale: The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS) short-form, designed by Pfeiffer and Wong (1989), is a 17-item scale with

3 subscales. The MJS evaluates the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components of jealousy. The cognitive subscale includes 5 items which measure to which extent the individual has concerns and doubts regarding the partner's fidelity. For the cognitive subscale, participants indicated how often certain thoughts about their partner occurred, with responses ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (all the time). A sample item is, 'I suspect that my partner may be attracted to someone else'. The emotional subscale has 6 items and measures the strength of emotional jealousy in situations that cause the experience of jealousy, for

example, 'My partner hugs and kisses someone of the opposite sex'. These items were scored on a scale ranging from 1 (very pleased) to 7 (very upset). The behavioural subscale measures the frequency of actions and activities that are expressions of jealousy, such as *looking through a partner's pockets, and questioning others about a partner's movement*. The participant reports how often he or she is involved in these types of actions on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (all the time). The authors of the scale have reported a good reliability for the overall scale and all its subscales; they reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, 0.85, and 0.89, respectively, for the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural subscales (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83, 0.91, and 0.78 was obtained for the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural subscales, respectively.

Procedure: For sampling, 2 local government areas in Delta State, Nigeria, were randomly selected. The staff of Central Hospital, Guinness Nigeria Breweries, and Brightfield International School was approached after the management of these institutions had been informed about the nature and purpose of the study, and permission to interview the staff was sought and granted. Paper questionnaires were distributed among the personnel of these institutions who signed a written informed consent form. No identifying information was obtained on the questionnaire, and a sealed bag was available at each institution in which participants could drop their completed questionnaires. A total of 265 participants were approached, from among them 235 agreed to participate in the study. Moreover, 6 questionnaires which were incomplete were discarded.

Data analysis: Data were electronically entered into a spreadsheet. SPSS software (version 22; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sociodemographic variables, and inferential statistics (t-test for independent samples, and one-way ANOVA) were used to assess the hypotheses. The level of significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

Ethical Approval: As our investigation was performed on human subjects, the ethical principles of research on human subjects were observed in this study in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Moreover, the research purpose and methodology were subjected to scrutiny by the Internal Research Ethics Committee of Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, and were given due approval. Furthermore, the ethical guidelines and approval of the Central Hospital, Guinness Nigeria Breweries, and Brightfield International School were duly obtained before the commencement of the study. Ethical code does not apply to this scale of research [see National Code of Health Research Ethics; National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC); section B, item A; http://www.nhrec.net/nhrec/NCHRE_10.pdf].

The confidentiality of the study participants' information was maintained throughout the study by preserving their anonymity and asking them to provide honest answers. Participation in this survey was voluntary, and no incentive was offered to participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before participation.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of participants: Slightly over half (54.6%) of the participants were women, while the remainder (45.4%) were men. A majority (91.3%) were Christians, while 3.1% ($n = 7$) were Muslims and 5.7% ($n = 13$) were affiliated to a traditional religion. As regards the highest educational attainment, 24% had either National Certificate of Education (NCE) or National Diploma (ND), 64.2% had either a first degree or Higher National Diploma (HND), and 11.8% had a master's degree (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency distribution showing respondents’ sociodemographic characteristics

Factors	Options	n (%)
Sex	Male	104 (45.4)
	Female	125 (54.6)
	Total	229 (100)
Religion	Christianity	209 (91.3)
	Islam	7 (3.1)
	Traditional	13 (5.7)
	Total	229 (100)
Educational qualification	NCE/ND	55 (24.0)
	First degree/HND	147 (64.2)
	Master’s Degree	27 (11.8)
	Total	229 (100)
Occupation	Health workers	108 (47.2)
	Brewery workers	60 (26.2)
	Teachers	61 (26.6)
	Total	229 (100)
Marriage type	Monogamy	146 (63.8)
	Polygamy	83 (36.2)
	Total	229 (100)
Family home status	Monogamous home	122 (53.3)
	Polygamous home	107 (46.7)
	Total	229 (100)

NCE: National Certificate of Education; ND: National Diploma; HND: Higher National Diploma

The occupational distribution of the sampled participants was 47.2% health workers, 26.2% brewery workers, and 26.6% teachers. A majority (63.8%) were from monogamous, while 36.2% had polygamous. In terms of their family home status, 53.3% were raised in monogamous homes, while 46.7% were from polygamous homes (Table 1).

Pattern of romantic jealousy: The severity of romantic jealousy is presented in table 2. Gender differences were observed in the results across the various forms of romantic jealousy. For cognitive jealousy, about 1 in 10 participants reported severe cognitive jealousy. The rate in women (15.2%) was slightly higher compared to men (12.5%). In the emotional jealousy domain, nearly 2 in 10 participants reported severe emotional jealousy, and there was a female preponderance as regards the severe form (20.8% vs. 15.4%). The prevalence of severe behavioural jealousy was nearly 2 in 10, with women more likely to report the severe form (19.2% vs. 16.3%).

Determinants of romantic jealousy: The gender of participants was compared across the domains of romantic jealousy. In the cognitive domain, women were significantly more likely to hold jealous cognitions [t (227) = -2.14; P < 0.05] (Table 3).

Table 2. Prevalence of Romantic Jealousy among women and men

Romantic Jealousy	Sex	N	Prevalence			
			None	Mild	Moderate	Severe
			n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Cognitive jealousy	Male	104	19 (18.3)	30 (28.8)	42 (40.4)	13 (12.5)
	Female	125	29 (23.2)	14 (11.2)	63 (50.4)	19 (15.2)
	Total	229	49 (21.4)	40 (17.5)	113 (49.3)	27 (11.8)
Emotional jealousy	Male	104	21 (20.2)	25 (24.0)	42 (40.4)	16 (15.4)
	Female	125	22 (17.6)	35 (28.0)	42 (33.6)	26 (20.8)
	Total	229	43 (18.8)	60 (26.2)	84 (36.7)	42 (18.3)
Behavioural jealousy	Male	104	13 (12.5)	45 (43.3)	29 (27.9)	17 (16.3)
	Female	125	15 (12.0)	62 (49.6)	24 (19.2)	24 (19.2)
	Total	229	34 (14.8)	101 (44.1)	53 (23.1)	41 (17.9)

Table 3. Independent t-test results regarding the influence of gender on romantic jealousy

Romantic Jealousy	Gender	N	Mean ± SD	df	t	P-value
Cognitive jealousy	Male	104	14.13 ± 7.06	227	-2.14	< 0.05
	Female	125	16.21 ± 7.49			
Emotional jealousy	Male	104	23.23 ± 10.10	227	-0.10	> 0.05
	Female	125	23.36 ± 9.88			
Behavioural jealousy	Male	104	14.30 ± 6.15	227	-2.94	< 0.01
	Female	125	17.08 ± 7.84			

SD: Standard deviation; df: Degree of freedom

A similar pattern was noted in the behavioural domain [$t(227) = -2.94$; $P < 0.01$]. There was no significant gender difference on the emotional jealousy domain [$t(227) = -0.10$; $P > 0.05$] (Table 3).

The domains of romantic jealousy were compared across occupational groups. In the cognitive jealousy domain, teachers had the highest average scores of jealousy (Mean ± SD = 18.15 ± 5.37), followed by brewery workers (Mean ± SD = 17.23 ± 7.71) and health workers, who had the lowest mean. On post hoc analysis, teachers showed significantly higher scores ($F = 16.11$; $P < 0.01$).

Health workers had the highest average score on the emotional jealousy domain (Mean ± SD = 25.63 ± 9.58), followed by brewery workers (Mean ± SD = 23.15 ± 11.25) and teachers (Mean ± SD = 19.33 ± 7.93), respectively. The post hoc comparison showed that health workers were significantly more likely to express emotional jealousy compared to the other occupational groups ($F = 8.32$; $P < 0.01$). Moreover, teachers were significantly more likely to express behavioural jealousy compared to brewery and healthcare workers ($F = 3.23$; $P < 0.05$) (Table 4).

Family type had no significant influence on cognitive jealousy [$t(227) = -1.80$; $P > 0.05$]. This indicates that individuals in monogamous homes (Mean ± SD = 14.61 ± 7.38) do not differ significantly from those in polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 16.42 ± 7.20) when compared in terms of the cognitive form of jealousy. It was also observed that family type had no significant influence on emotional jealousy [$t(227) = 0.68$; $P > 0.05$]. This means that individuals in monogamous homes (Mean ± SD = 23.64 ± 9.21) and those in polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 22.71 ± 11.19) do not differ significantly in terms of emotional jealousy. Lastly, family type indicated no significant difference in behavioural jealousy [$t(227) = -1.64$; $P > 0.05$]. This means that individuals in monogamous homes (Mean ± SD = 15.23 ± 6.62) do not differ significantly from those in polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 16.86 ± 8.15) in terms of behavioural jealousy (Table 5 and 6).

Table 4. The comparison of occupation of participants and domains of romantic jealousy

Romantic Jealousy	Occupation	N	Mean ± SD	F	P-value
Cognitive jealousy	Health workers	108	12.55 ± 7.20	16.11	< 0.01
	Brewery workers	60	17.23 ± 7.71		
	Teachers	61	18.15 ± 5.37		
	Total	229	15.27 ± 7.35		
Emotional jealousy	Health workers	108	25.63 ± 9.58	8.32	< 0.01
	Brewery workers	60	23.15 ± 11.25		
	Teachers	61	19.33 ± 7.93		
	Total	229	23.30 ± 9.96		
Behavioural jealousy	Health workers	108	14.40 ± 6.27	4.39	< 0.05
	Brewery workers	60	16.53 ± 8.24		
	Teachers	61	17.62 ± 7.40		
	Total	229	15.82 ± 7.24		

SD: Standard deviation

Table 5. Summary of independent t-test results regarding the influence of family type on romantic jealousy

Romantic Jealousy	Family type	N	Mean ± SD	df	t	P-value
Cognitive jealousy	Monogamy	146	14.61 ± 7.38	227	-1.80	> 0.05
	Polygamy	83	16.42 ± 7.20			
Emotional jealousy	Monogamy	146	23.64 ± 9.21	227	0.68	> 0.05
	Polygamy	83	22.71 ± 11.19			
Behavioural jealousy	Monogamy	146	15.23 ± 6.62	227	-1.64	> 0.05
	Polygamy	83	16.86 ± 8.15			

SD: Standard deviation; df: Degree of freedom

The findings on the influence of family home status on romantic jealousy revealed that an individual’s family home status had no significant influence on cognitive jealousy [$t(227) = -0.32$; $P > 0.05$]. This means that individuals in monogamous marriage settings homes (Mean ± SD = 15.12 ± 7.48) do not differ significantly from those that came from polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 15.43 ± 7.23) in terms of cognitive form of jealousy. Similarly, family home status had no significant influence on emotional jealousy [$t(227) = -0.93$; $P > 0.05$]. This means that individuals from non-polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 22.73 ± 10.19) and those from polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 23.95 ± 9.69) do not differ significantly in terms of emotional jealousy. Furthermore, family home status had no significant influence on behavioural jealousy [$t(227) = -0.10$; $P > 0.05$]. This means that individuals from non-polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 15.77 ± 7.36) do not differ significantly from those that came from polygamous homes (Mean ± SD = 15.87 ± 7.14) in terms of behavioural jealousy.

Discussion

This study was conducted with the aim to identify the patterns and sociodemographic correlates of romantic jealousy and found that a minority of participants reported the severe forms of romantic jealousy across all domains. When compared across gender groups, no significant differences were seen in the cognitive and emotional sub-domains, which was not consistent with what we hypothesized. However, it must be noted that female participants were significantly more likely to report the severest forms of behavioural romantic jealousy. When contrasted across occupational groups, health workers scored significantly higher on the cognitive sub-domain, while brewery workers were significantly more likely to report the emotional sub-domain. Family type and family home status had no significant influences on the pattern of romantic jealousy.

Romantic jealousy is a human construct seen across cultures (Buss, 2001). It can have both protective and deleterious impacts on mental health and family life (Attridge, 2013). According to the findings of this study, we observed gender differences in the prevalence, severity, and pattern of romantic jealousy.

Table 6. Summary of independent t-test results regarding the influence of family home type on romantic jealousy

Romantic Jealousy	Family home status	N	Mean ± SD	df	t	P-value
Cognitive Jealousy	Monogamous home	122	15.12 ± 7.48	227	-0.32	> 0.05
	Polygamous home	107	15.43 ± 7.23			
Emotional Jealousy	Not polygamous home	122	22.73 ± 10.19	227	-0.93	> 0.05
	Polygamous home	107	23.95 ± 9.69			
Behavioural Jealousy	Not polygamous home	122	15.77 ± 7.36	227	-0.10	> 0.05
	Polygamous home	107	15.87 ± 7.14			

SD: Standard deviation; df: Degree of freedom

This finding is not in line with that of some earlier studies, which either found no gender difference in the cognitive domain (Corzine, 2013) or reported that women were more likely to report the cognitive subtype of romantic jealousy (Gucló, Şenormancı, Şenormancı, & Köktürk, 2017). The cultural environment in this study setting was largely conservative. Therefore, men were more likely to have jealous thoughts and less likely to be expressive, which is consistent with the male partner role within this culture. It may be difficult to tease out the influence of religion on culture in this cohort, but with polygamy or multiple partnerships not being frowned at, men are more likely to engage in multiple partnerships and expect women not to do so because of the cultural taboos associated with it.

Female participants were significantly more likely to report emotional jealousy (women: 82.4% vs. men: 79.8%). This pattern was also noted among participants in a study in Turkey (Gucló et al., 2017). The variability in emotional expression may be linked to hormonal differences, learned responses, and the role of culture and religion. Zheng et al. (2021) demonstrated an increase in the intensity of romantic jealousy after men received pre-specified doses of the hormone oxytocin. This hormone is differentially in higher concentrations in women compared to men, and it is now theorised that it plays a significant role in jealous behaviour that may have protective or deleterious effects on the 'safety' of relationships. Furthermore, in societies where polygamy is endorsed, women may demonstrate higher levels of emotional romantic jealousy (Kyejombe, Stern, & Buller, 2022).

Gender has been reported to be a better predictor of emotional jealousy compared to culture. Though we did not adjust for cultural differences in our study as reported in an earlier study in Hawaii that culture only significantly moderated the behavioural aspects of romantic jealousy, previous history of infidelity, and issues relating to time commitment and social media use (Zandbergen & Brown, 2015). Gender differences in the expression of romantic jealousy may also have evolutionary underpinnings. According to social cognitive and evolutionary psychology theories, men are more likely to report romantic jealousy due to sexual rather than emotional infidelity. A recent study also noted that men are more likely to be distressed by actual acts of infidelity when compared to 'emotional intimacy' (Ward & Voracek, 2004).

Expectedly, women were slightly more likely to report the behavioural jealousy sub-domain compared to men (88% vs. 87.5%). The similarity in prevalence was unexpected and may be explained by the severity of romantic jealousy, wherein irrespective of gender, partners are likely to behave in a consistent manner when they perceive a threat to their relationships. It remains to be seen if there is an actual variation between what people say they would do, and what they actually do when threatened. This study could not answer this question.

In comparing romantic jealousy across occupational groups, teachers had the highest average scores of jealousy, followed by brewery workers, while health workers had the lowest scores. The role of personality type, knowledge about jealousy and relationships, as well as level of education may have confounded these findings. We did not however assess for these factors in the present study. Health workers had the highest average score on the emotional jealousy domain, followed by brewery workers and teachers, respectively. Teachers were significantly more likely to express behavioural jealousy compared to brewery and healthcare workers. There was no significant difference in romantic jealousy among participants from polygamous and monogamous homes.

The findings from this study should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind. First, this was a moderate sample and the selection method used was convenience sampling, and therefore, selection bias may have influenced participant selection. We only recruited participants from two local government areas in the state; therefore, findings may not be generalizable to all Nigerian adults.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a high prevalence of romantic jealousy among adults in Delta State, Nigeria. Romantic jealousy can be triggered by the action or inaction of the partner, and maintained by cognitive biases and the psychological benefits that it initially bestows on the relationship. In the long run, however, it poses dangerous risks to the patient, the partner, and the imagined rival, to the extent that involuntary hospitalization is sometimes required. Treatment recommendations include couple therapy, antipsychotic medication, and interventions that enhance self-esteem.

Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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