

Emerging Trends and Socio-Psychological Consequences of Intra-Family and Intimate Homicide in Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Homicide occurring within familial and intimate relationships represents a significant public health, criminological, and forensic psychiatric concern because it violates fundamental expectations of trust, protection, and social cohesion. Despite increasing public concern in northern Nigeria, systematic forensic psychiatric analysis of intra-family and intimate homicide remains limited. This study examines emerging trends and socio-psychological consequences of familial and intimate homicide in Kano State, Nigeria, using an integrated ecological and stress-vulnerability framework. Drawing on forensic psychiatric theory and socio-ecological models of violence, the study explores how individual vulnerabilities, relational conflict, socioeconomic pressures, and broader cultural influences interact in the production of lethal violence within intimate and family settings. The study situates recent cases of filicide, intimate partner homicide, amicide, and extended family killings within the context of poverty, urbanization, social isolation, gendered power relations, and limited access to mental health and psychosocial support services. Particular attention is given to the psychosocial trajectories preceding homicide, including impaired impulse control, chronic interpersonal stress, coercive dynamics, and cumulative emotional strain. The study also examines the potential role of media representations of violence, including Kannywood and international cinematic narratives, in shaping cognitive scripts surrounding jealousy, revenge, honor, and retaliatory violence. Findings suggest that familial and intimate homicide in Kano State is rarely attributable to a single factor; rather, it emerges through the interaction of psychological vulnerability and cumulative social stressors operating across multiple ecological levels. The consequences extend beyond immediate victims and perpetrators, generating profound psychological trauma,

social stigma, family disintegration, and community insecurity. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive forensic psychiatric interventions, improved mental health services, early risk identification, and strengthened community-based prevention mechanisms. By contextualizing intimate and family homicide within both global forensic psychiatric scholarship and local sociocultural realities, the study contributes to the development of evidence-informed violence prevention strategies in low- and middle-income settings.

Keywords

Homicide, Mental Health, Nigeria, Forensic Psychiatry, Social Context

1. Introduction

Homicide within familial and intimate relationships constitutes one of the most psychologically and socially destabilizing forms of violence, as it violates deeply entrenched expectations of care, trust, and protection. Forensic psychiatric scholarship consistently shows that such homicides rarely result from singular causes; rather, they emerge from complex interactions between individual vulnerability, relational stressors, and broader socio-structural pressures. Globally, a substantial proportion of homicide perpetrators are parents, spouses, relatives, or close associates, underscoring the centrality of intimate relationships in lethal violence (World Health Organization (WHO), 2014; Liem et al., 2017; Liem & Koenraadt, 2018).

The ecological model of violence offers a robust framework for understanding these dynamics by situating homicide risk across multiple interacting levels: individual (e.g., mental illness, substance use, impaired impulse control), relational (e.g., intimate partner conflict, coercive control), community (e.g., poverty, social isolation, weak protective institutions), and societal (e.g., gender norms, economic instability, legal pluralism) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; World Health Organization (WHO), 2014). Complementing this, the stress-vulnerability model posits that violent behavior is more likely to occur when cumulative psychosocial stressors overwhelm an individual's coping capacity, particularly in the presence of pre-existing psychological vulnerability or diminished self-regulation (Monahan, 1992). Together, these frameworks allow forensic analysis to move beyond reductionist explanations toward a contextualized understanding of lethal violence.

Recent cases from Kano State, northwestern Nigeria, suggest an emerging pattern consistent with these models, wherein homicide increasingly unfolds within private and familiar spaces rather than anonymous public settings. Incidents involving filicide, intimate partner homicide, amicide, and extended family killings reflect the convergence of economic hardship, social isolation, gendered power asymmetries, and limited access to mental health and social support services. These stressors are further amplified in a rapidly urbanizing environment marked by socioeconomic inequality and constrained forensic psychiatric infrastructure.

An underexplored but relevant dimension within this ecological context is the role of social modeling of violence through popular media. Cinematic portrayals, both locally produced films (e.g., Kannywood narratives depicting marital conflict, jealousy, and retaliatory violence) and widely circulated international films portraying intimate betrayal, spousal killing, or family annihilation, may contribute to the normalization or symbolic rehearsal of violent responses to interpersonal stress. Social learning theory suggests that repeated exposure to dramatized violence, particularly when framed as justified or inevitable, can influence cognitive scripts for conflict resolution, especially among psychologically vulnerable individuals (Bandura, 1977). While films do not cause homicide, they may shape cultural narratives around honor, jealousy, revenge, and control, which intersect with existing stressors and vulnerabilities.

Despite increasing public concern, systematic forensic psychiatric analysis of intra-family and intimate homicide in northern Nigeria remains limited. Most available accounts are journalistic or legal, offering little insight into the psychosocial trajectories, relational dynamics, and post-homicide consequences for survivors and communities. This study addresses this gap by examining emerging trends and socio-psychological consequences of intra-family and intimate homicide in Kano State, using an integrated ecological and stress-vulnerability framework. By situating local cases within established forensic psychiatric theory, global empirical literature, and culturally salient models of violence, the study aims to inform risk assessment, early intervention, and contextually appropriate prevention strategies in low- and middle-income settings.

2. Approach

This paper adopts a narrative, case-based conceptual analysis to examine familial and intimate homicide in Kano State, Nigeria, through the lenses of the ecological model of violence and the stress-vulnerability framework. Rather than estimating the incidence or temporal trends of homicide, the paper uses selected illustrative cases to explore the interaction of psychological, community, and societal factors that contribute to lethal violence within familial and intimate relationships.

Illustrative cases were purposively selected because they represented diverse homicide typologies relevant to forensic psychiatric practice, including child homicide, filicide, intimate partner homicide, interpersonal homicide involving socially connected individuals, homicide within familiar community settings, and multiple-victim familial homicide. Cases were identified from publicly available sources published between October 2020 and January 2026, including reports from the Kano State Police Command, court proceedings, the Kano State Ministry of Justice, the National Human Rights Commission, and reputable Nigerian media organizations such as Premium Times, Daily Trust, Punch, Vanguard, Channels Television, BBC News Pidgin, Daily Post, The Guardian Nigeria, and the International Centre for Investigative Reporting.

Cases were included when they: 1) occurred in Kano State; 2) involved homi-

cide within familial, intimate, or otherwise established social relationships; 3) were supported by official investigative reports, court proceedings, or multiple independent media sources; and 4) provided sufficient contextual information to permit forensic psychiatric interpretation. Isolated stranger homicides, cases lacking corroborating documentation, and incidents with insufficient publicly available information were excluded.

The selected cases are presented as illustrative examples rather than epidemiological evidence of homicide trends. Interpretations are informed by established forensic psychiatric literature, contemporary empirical evidence, and internationally recognized theoretical frameworks, with care taken to distinguish verified facts from interpretations derived from publicly available reports.

3. Illustrative Cases and Patterns of Homicide in Kano State

The following publicly reported cases are presented as illustrative examples of diverse homicide typologies documented in Kano State. Rather than demonstrating epidemiological trends, these cases provide contextual insight into the range of interpersonal and familial homicides encountered within the state and their potential relevance to forensic psychiatric practice.

A widely reported case of maternal filicide occurred in October 2020 in Diso Quarters, Gwale Local Government Area, Kano State, where a 26-year-old woman was alleged to have killed her two children before attempting suicide ([The Nation, 2020](#); [Sobowale, 2020](#); [BBC News Pidgin, 2020](#)) Filicide, defined as the killing of one's own child ([Oathout, 2020](#)), has been associated with a complex interplay of psychiatric disorders, psychosocial adversity, impaired parent-child attachment, domestic stressors, and socioeconomic deprivation ([Brown et al., 2017](#); [Cullen, 2019](#); [Frederick et al., 2022](#); [Graham et al., 2025](#)). Although the precise circumstances and motives in this case remain based on publicly reported accounts rather than judicial or psychiatric evaluation, the incident underscores the importance of early recognition of maternal mental health problems, comprehensive psychosocial assessment, timely referral for specialist psychiatric care, and improved access to family support and community-based intervention services. At the ecological level, this case illustrates how individual vulnerabilities may interact with relational and broader social stressors to increase the risk of severe family violence.

Another widely publicized case involved the abduction and killing of five-year-old Miss H.A., a nursery school pupil in Kano, who was abducted in December 2021 by the proprietor of her school ([BBC News, 2022](#)). Following police investigation and prosecution, Mr. A.T. and Mr. H.I. were convicted by the Kano State High Court for kidnapping and murder and sentenced to death, a judgment that was subsequently upheld by the Court of Appeal ([FIDA Nigeria, 2022](#); [Ibrahim, 2022](#); [Kasali, 2022](#)). This case represents pedicide (child homicide) perpetrated by non-parental caregivers and constitutes a profound breach of professional trust and child safeguarding responsibilities. Evidence presented during the trial, including police investigative findings and the defendants' reported confessional

statements, reinforced the seriousness of the offenses and the importance of effective criminal justice responses. Beyond the criminal justice implications, the incident exposed vulnerabilities in child protection systems, emphasizing the need for strengthened safeguarding policies within educational institutions, routine background screening of school personnel, and improved collaboration between educational authorities, child protection agencies, and law enforcement. From an ecological perspective, the case illustrates how failures at the relationship and community levels, including abuse of positions of trust and inadequate institutional safeguards, may interact to increase children's vulnerability to serious interpersonal violence.

In 2022, Mr. G.Q., a 47-year-old Chinese national, was charged with the murder of his 22-year-old Nigerian fiancée, Miss U.S, following an incident in the Janbulo area of Kano State. After judicial proceedings, the Kano State High Court convicted him of murder and sentenced him to death by hanging in March 2024 (Anthony, 2022; Egobiambu, 2024; BBC News Pidgin, 2024). Earlier court proceedings and police investigations were also reported by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR, 2024). This case illustrates intimate partner homicide involving unmarried partners, rather than uxoricide in its strict forensic definition, which refers to the killing of one's wife. Previous studies have identified sexual jealousy, possessiveness perceived infidelity (Shakespeare, 1988), and coercive relationship dynamics as important risk factors for intimate partner homicide (Adinkrah, 2008; Duntley & Buss, 2011; Easton & Shackelford, 2009). Although media reports suggested that the alleged offense may have been precipitated by relationship conflict and suspected infidelity, these should be interpreted as reported motives derived from court proceedings and public accounts rather than as independently verified psychiatric or behavioral explanations. From an ecological perspective, the case highlights the interaction between individual factors, interpersonal relationship conflict, and inadequate early recognition of escalating intimate partner violence, underscoring the importance of routine violence risk assessment and preventive interventions within intimate relationships.

In December 2023, Mr N.H. was reportedly killed in the Unguwa Uku area of Kano State following an alleged dispute involving a married couple, Mr D.A and Mrs H.S. According to police reports, the suspects were arrested in connection with the homicide and subsequently arraigned before the court (Ajasa, 2023; Sulaimon, 2023). Media accounts indicated that the alleged offence was linked to a financial dispute involving an outstanding debt of approximately ₦10 million; however, this reported motive has not been independently established beyond the available investigative and court records. This case illustrates interpersonal homicide occurring between individuals with an established social relationship, highlighting how financial conflict and interpersonal disputes may escalate to lethal violence. Although homicides involving acquaintances are less frequently discussed as distinct forensic subtypes than intimate partner or familial homicide (Shackelford et al., 2000), they underscore the importance of considering inter-

personal stressors, financial conflict, and social relationship dynamics during violence risk assessment. From an ecological perspective, the case reflects the interaction between individual decision-making, relationship-level conflict, and broader socioeconomic pressures that may contribute to serious interpersonal violence.

A widely reported homicide occurred in December 2025 in the Hoto Maraba area of Kano State, where an elderly muezzin was allegedly killed inside a mosque by a man who reportedly resided in the same neighborhood ([Daily Trust, 2025](#); [Bello, 2025](#); [Ibrahim, 2025](#)). According to police reports, the suspect was arrested shortly after the incident and charged in connection with the offense. Public reports further indicated that the victim and the suspect were known to one another, although the precise motive remained under investigation at the time of reporting. The incident illustrates homicide occurring between individuals with pre-existing social proximity, reinforcing evidence that many lethal assaults occur within familiar social environments rather than between strangers. Although publicly available reports do not permit conclusions regarding psychiatric or behavioral causation, the case highlights the importance of recognizing escalating interpersonal conflict and behavioral disturbances within communities. From an ecological perspective, it reflects the interaction between individual-level factors, relationship dynamics, and community-level opportunities for early detection and intervention before violence escalates.

One of the most significant recent familial homicide incidents in Kano State occurred in January 2026 in the Dorayi Chiranchi area, where a woman and her six children were allegedly killed by relatives ([Akhimien, 2026](#); [BBC News Pidgin, 2026](#); [Maishanu, 2026](#); [National Human Rights Commission \(NHRC\), 2026](#)). Following police investigations, three suspects, Umar Auwalu, Isyaku Yakubu, and Yakubu Abdulaziz, were arrested and subsequently charged by the Kano State Ministry of Justice in connection with the offenses ([Akhimien, 2026](#)). Investigative reports further suggested possible links between this incident and earlier homicides reported in Tudun Yola in November 2025, including the deaths of two co-wives and another female relative, although these links remain subject to ongoing judicial and investigative processes. Consequently, any proposed motives or relationships between the incidents should be interpreted cautiously and regarded as allegations rather than established facts.

Although these incidents do not fulfill the strict forensic definition of family annihilation, they share characteristics of multiple-victim familial homicide involving closely related family members ([Diaz et al., 2022](#); [Dietz, 1986](#); [Szalewski, 2020](#); [Adewale, 2026](#)). Published literature suggests that severe family violence may arise from the interaction of financial hardship, longstanding interpersonal conflict, family fragmentation, perceived social humiliation, and other psychosocial stressors; however, these factors cannot be inferred as causal explanations for the present case on the basis of publicly available reports alone ([Yardley, 2014](#)). From an ecological perspective, the incident illustrates the convergence of individual vulnerabilities, entrenched family conflict, community-level failures in early

conflict detection, and broader societal determinants that may contribute to extreme intra-familial violence. The case further underscores the importance of coordinated multidisciplinary responses involving law enforcement, mental health professionals, social welfare agencies, and community leaders in the prevention of serious family violence.

Viewed collectively, these illustrative cases suggest that homicide in Kano frequently occurs within existing familial, intimate, or socially connected relationships rather than between strangers. Although these examples cannot be interpreted as evidence of temporal trends, they demonstrate recurring patterns of interpersonal violence that provide valuable context for forensic psychiatric practice and violence prevention.

From an ecological perspective, these cases illustrate how homicide may arise from interacting influences operating at multiple levels. At the individual level, untreated mental illness, substance misuse, impulsivity, and maladaptive coping may increase vulnerability to violent behavior. At the relationship level, intimate partner conflict, family disputes, jealousy, and caregiver stress were reported across several of the cases described. At the community level, limited access to mental health services, inadequate child protection mechanisms, weak social support, and neighborhood disorganization may reduce opportunities for early intervention. At the societal level, poverty, unemployment, gender norms, inadequate forensic mental health resources, and barriers to timely justice may create broader conditions that increase the risk of interpersonal violence. These interconnected influences support the application of the ecological model as a useful framework for understanding homicide prevention in Kano State.

4. Discussion

From a criminological and sociological perspective, the observed patterns of intra-family and intimate homicide in Kano State reflect the interaction of individual vulnerability and relational strain. Untreated mental disorders, substance misuse, depressive symptomatology, and cumulative economic stress increase susceptibility to extreme behavioral responses under pressure (Monahan, 1992; Fazel et al., 2009).

At the relational level, domestic power asymmetries, coercive control, unresolved interpersonal conflict, and the weakening of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms intensify risk (Stark, 2007; Liem et al., 2017). In sociocultural environments where family matters are regarded as strictly private and external intervention is discouraged, violence becomes increasingly privatized within households, thereby weakening early-warning and reporting mechanisms (World Health Organization (WHO), 2014).

At the community and societal levels, these homicides reflect broader structural stressors that sustain vulnerability. Poverty, social isolation, stigma surrounding mental illness and marital discord, and limited access to community-based mental health care constrain opportunities for early intervention (Patel et al., 2018). Within

an ecological and stress-vulnerability framework, lethal violence represents not an isolated act but the cumulative outcome of prolonged, unmitigated psychosocial strain operating across multiple social layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; World Health Organization (WHO), 2014).

Inadequacies in criminal justice administration may indirectly contribute to the persistence of such violence. Prolonged investigations, delayed prosecutions, and extended delays in the execution of judgments, particularly in capital cases, risked weakening the deterrent effect of the law (Nagin, 2013). Recurrent failure to enforce final court decisions undermines the symbolic authority of the legal system and erodes public confidence in the state's capacity to protect life and sanction severe violence. Empirical evidence suggests that perceived certainty and timeliness of punishment, rather than severity alone, are critical to deterrence (Nagin, 2013).

The concentration of these homicides within trusted relationships further exposes deficiencies in child-protection systems, domestic violence response mechanisms, and community mental health services. At the service-delivery level, stigma, limited accessibility, and weak intersectoral coordination allow domestic crises to escalate unchecked. Warning signs, including psychological deterioration, escalating conflict, and prior threats of violence, often remain unrecognized until fatal outcomes occur, a pattern widely documented in intimate partner and family homicide literature (Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Jordan & McIntosh, 2011).

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for coordinated, multi-level interventions. Effective prevention requires early identification of individual psychological vulnerability, disruption of harmful relational dynamics, community-based mental health engagement, and credible legal accountability. Without sustained intervention across ecological domains, intra-family and intimate homicide is likely to persist as a recurrent manifestation of unresolved vulnerability embedded within private relational spaces rather than an aberration detectable by existing systems (World Health Organization (WHO), 2014).

5. Emerging Forensic Psychiatric Implications

The illustrative cases reviewed in this paper demonstrate that homicidal violence within familial and intimate relationships in Kano State is best understood as the product of interacting psychological, relational, community, and societal influences rather than isolated criminal acts. From a forensic psychiatric perspective, these findings reinforce the need to integrate clinical assessment with contextual evaluation of interpersonal relationships, psychosocial stressors, and environmental risk factors when assessing the potential for serious violence.

A central implication concerns violence risk assessment. Although severe violence remains relatively uncommon among individuals with mental disorders, the coexistence of untreated psychiatric illness, substance misuse, persistent interpersonal conflict, previous threats of violence, coercive control, suicidal ideation, or marked psychosocial deterioration should prompt comprehensive forensic psy-

chiatric evaluation (Fazel et al., 2009; Monahan, 1992). Structured professional judgement approaches to violence risk assessment, incorporating both static and dynamic risk factors, provide a more balanced and evidence-informed alternative to relying solely on clinical intuition. Within the Nigerian context, incorporating routine violence risk assessment into psychiatric services, emergency departments, primary healthcare settings, and domestic violence response programmes may facilitate earlier identification of individuals at increased risk of lethal interpersonal violence.

The reviewed cases also underscore the importance of strengthening referral pathways between healthcare services and community support systems. Opportunities for intervention frequently arise before homicide occurs through presentations with depression, suicidal behavior, substance misuse, escalating domestic conflict, child protection concerns, or repeated family crises. Primary healthcare providers, emergency physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, religious leaders, and community-based organizations should be equipped to recognize these warning signs and refer individuals and families for timely multidisciplinary assessment. Establishing clear referral protocols between primary care, mental health services, social welfare agencies, family support services, and law enforcement may substantially improve opportunities for early intervention in high-risk situations.

Interagency collaboration represents another critical implication. The complexity of familial and intimate homicide extends beyond the remit of any single institution. Effective prevention requires coordinated engagement among mental health professionals, the Kano State Police Command, the Ministry of Justice, child protection services, women's protection agencies, correctional services, and community and religious leaders. Such collaboration facilitates information sharing, coordinated risk management, safeguarding of vulnerable individuals, and timely intervention when escalating violence is identified. Multidisciplinary case review mechanisms, similar to domestic homicide review models implemented in several jurisdictions, may provide valuable lessons for adapting violence prevention strategies within the Nigerian context.

The findings further highlight the importance of strengthening forensic mental health services in low- and middle-income countries. Limited availability of specialist forensic psychiatric assessment, inadequate community mental health infrastructure, shortages of trained mental health professionals, and persistent stigma surrounding mental illness reduce opportunities for prevention. Expanding community-based mental health services, integrating mental health into primary healthcare, and improving access to crisis intervention services may reduce untreated psychological distress and improve engagement with individuals experiencing significant psychosocial adversity.

The ecological framework adopted in this paper further suggests that violence prevention should not focus exclusively on individual psychopathology. At the relationship level, interventions should strengthen family functioning, conflict res-

olution, and responses to intimate partner violence. At the community level, improving child safeguarding systems, increasing public mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and expanding access to psychosocial support services are essential. At the societal level, policies addressing poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and barriers to accessing mental healthcare may indirectly reduce cumulative psychosocial stressors associated with serious interpersonal violence. These multi-level interventions are consistent with contemporary public health approaches to violence prevention and recognize that homicide emerges from interacting determinants operating across ecological systems rather than a single causal pathway.

Finally, these findings have important implications for forensic psychiatric training, research, and policy development in Nigeria. Greater collaboration between forensic psychiatrists, criminologists, legal practitioners, public health specialists, and policymakers is needed to develop contextually appropriate violence prevention strategies. Future research should move beyond descriptive case reports by establishing prospective homicide surveillance systems, strengthening forensic psychiatric data collection, and examining modifiable risk factors within Nigerian communities. Such efforts would improve the evidence base for violence risk assessment while supporting the development of culturally responsive prevention programmes capable of reducing the burden of familial and intimate homicide in low- and middle-income settings.

6. Conclusion

Intra-familial and intimate homicides in Kano State reflect the convergence of structural, psychological, and institutional vulnerabilities rather than isolated incidents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Monahan, 1992; World Health Organization (WHO), 2014). These events highlight untreated mental illness, cumulative psychosocial stress, weak community surveillance, and insufficient child-protection and domestic violence systems (Patel et al., 2018; Liem et al., 2017). Addressing this phenomenon requires a coordinated, multi-level response, including strengthened mental health services, early-intervention mechanisms, functional reporting structures, and sustained public awareness initiatives. Equally critical is the consistent enforcement of judicial rulings and timely prosecution, as deterrence depends on certainty and promptness of legal action (Nagin, 2013). Only through integrated collaboration among government agencies, traditional and religious authorities, health professionals, and civil society can the cycle of extreme familial violence be disrupted, the rule of law restored, and trusted social networks safeguarded against lethal conflict.

7. Limitations

This analysis has several limitations. The reliance on retrospective case material and publicly available records limits causal inference and precludes standardized psychiatric assessment of perpetrators and victims. Cultural sensitivities, stigma,

and incomplete documentation may have led to underreporting of mental illness, substance use, or prior domestic violence. In addition, the absence of systematic comparison groups constrains generalizability beyond the local context. Nonetheless, the use of an ecological and stress-vulnerability framework provides a theoretically grounded and clinically meaningful lens for interpreting emerging patterns and guiding future empirical forensic psychiatric research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Monahan, 1992).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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