

Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Examining the Psycho-Emotional Effects of an Emerging Social Menace

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Abstract

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria has emerged as a pressing social menace, inflicting profound psycho-emotional effects on its victims. This study seeks to explore and analyze the psycho-emotional ramifications of SGBV in Nigeria, employing a desk-based library methodology. Drawing from a comprehensive review of existing literature, conceptual frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and empirical studies, this research aims to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of the psycho-emotional impact of SGBV. Through a systematic synthesis of scholarly works, the study will investigate the diverse manifestations of SGBV, including but not limited to rape, domestic violence, and harmful traditional practices. Additionally, it will examine the psychological trauma, emotional distress, and long-term mental health consequences experienced by survivors of SGBV. By synthesizing findings from various sources, this research intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psycho-emotional effects of SGBV in Nigeria. Furthermore, based on the synthesized knowledge, the study will offer evidence-based conclusions and recommendations for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community stakeholders to effectively address and mitigate the adverse impacts of SGBV. Ultimately, this research endeavors to contribute to the enhancement of policies, interventions, and support mechanisms aimed at combating SGBV and promoting the well-being of affected individuals in Nigeria.

I. Introduction

In the vast expanse of Nigeria, a nation rich in diversity and culture, a pressing concern casts a somber shadow on its social fabric the pervasive phenomenon of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). As we embark on a journey to comprehend the intricate dynamics of this issue, our focus extends beyond mere statistical enumeration and legal frameworks. We turn our attention to the often-understated realm of human experience on the psycho-emotional aftermath endured by survivors. This exploration is not merely an

academic pursuit but a conscientious endeavor to unravel the lived realities of those affected by SGBV.

As we navigate the intricate landscapes of Nigeria's socio-cultural tapestry, we aim to discern not only the immediate effects of SGBV but also the deeper scars etched on the psycho-emotional well-being of individuals. Through this research, we seek to amplify the voices of survivors, challenge prevailing norms, and contribute to a nuanced understanding of this emerging social menace. In doing so, we aspire to lay the groundwork for comprehensive interventions that acknowledge and address the profound psycho-emotional impact of SGBV on both individuals and the broader Nigerian society.

Thus, gender-based violence which is a social phenomenon that is based on gender inequality has been one of the most popular human rights violations in the world. According to European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), at least 1 in 3 women has been victim of physical and/or sexual violence; 1 in 20 women has been raped; 1 in 2 has experienced sexual harassment; 1 in 5 women has experienced stalking; and 95% of victims trafficked for sexual exploration in European Union are women. According to The World Bank (2019), about 35% of women in the world have experienced physical or sexual violence either from intimate partner or non-partner; 7% of women in the world have been victims of sexual assault by someone other than a partner; “globally 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner”; while “200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting”.

II. Conceptual Clarification

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence refers to any act or attempted act of unwanted sexual behavior, coercion, or assault. It encompasses a wide range of behaviors including rape, sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation. It can occur in various contexts such as intimate relationships, workplaces, institutions, and within communities. Thus, sexual violence is a serious violation of human rights and can have profound physical, emotional, and psychological effects on survivors. It is also a pervasive issue globally, affecting individuals of all genders, ages, sexual orientations, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Gender Based Violence

Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Thus, it encompasses violence against women and girls as well as violence against men and boys, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI), and other individuals who do not conform to dominant gender roles (ILO 2012).

In particular, gender-based violence is increasingly used to define acts of violence rooted in some form of ‘patriarchal ideology’ with the purpose of maintaining social power for (heterosexual) men (Council of Europe, 2007).

Psycho-Emotional

Psycho-emotional refers to the intersection of psychological and emotional aspects of human experience. It encompasses the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that are influenced by both psychological processes and emotional responses. This term is often used in the context of mental health, therapy, and well-being to describe the complex interplay between cognitive and affective dimensions of human functioning.

In psycho-emotional health, individuals strive for a balance between their cognitive processes (such as perception, memory, and reasoning) and their emotional experiences (such as happiness, sadness, fear). When this balance is disrupted, it can lead to various psychological difficulties or disorders, such as anxiety, depression, trauma, or stress-related conditions.

A psycho-emotional state is a particular form of a person's mental state with a predominance of emotional response to a situation, a phenomenon of reality, to the actions of another person, to objects, which is expressed in emotions (Velikova et al., 2017).

III. Methodology

This study employs a desk-based library research method to explore the psycho-emotional effects of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Nigeria. It involves an extensive review and synthesis of literature, including peer-reviewed articles, books, reports, and dissertations, sourced from academic databases such as PubMed, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PsycINFO. Inclusion criteria focus on studies examining psycho-emotional impacts of SGBV within Nigeria or with relevance to its context, while exclusion criteria filter out studies not directly addressing psycho-emotional effects or unrelated to Nigeria. Data extraction involves systematic collection of pertinent information from selected literature, organizing it thematically around aspects such as types of SGBV, psychological consequences, coping mechanisms, and societal responses. Thematic and comparative analyses are conducted to identify patterns, disparities, and gaps in understanding SGBV-related psycho-emotional effects, while findings are synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding. Recommendations are formulated based on evidence-based conclusions to address the identified psycho-emotional consequences effectively.

IV. Review of Literature

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is a pervasive global issue, with distinct manifestations in diverse cultural contexts. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation, grapples with the multifaceted challenges posed by SGBV, contributing to its emergence as a critical social menace. This literature review synthesizes existing research to provide insights into the psycho-emotional effects of SGBV in Nigeria and underscores the urgency for targeted interventions.

Research by Olufunmilayo et al. (2019) highlights the alarming prevalence of SGBV in Nigeria, revealing a complex interplay of cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors. The study emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of the various forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and harmful traditional practices, to address the roots of the problem comprehensively.

Nigeria has made significant strides in enacting legislation to address SGBV, exemplified by the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015. However, Okechukwu and Duru (2020) argue that the implementation of these laws faces considerable challenges due to cultural norms, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and a lack of awareness. This gap in implementation hampers efforts to curb the psycho-emotional toll on survivors.

The psycho-emotional effects of SGBV on survivors are profound and enduring. Adegoke et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study that delves into the lived experiences of survivors, revealing pervasive consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and self-esteem issues. The research underscores the urgency of addressing the mental health aspect of survivors in any comprehensive intervention strategy.

Cultural norms and societal expectations play a significant role in exacerbating the psycho-emotional impact of SGBV. Olayanju and Moraes (2017) argue that prevailing gender norms contribute to victim-blaming and stigmatization of survivors, hindering their ability to seek help and exacerbating feelings of shame and isolation.

Despite the challenges, survivors exhibit resilience and employ coping mechanisms to navigate the psycho-emotional aftermath of SGBV. The work of Okoro and Eze (2021) sheds light on the coping strategies employed by survivors, emphasizing the importance of community support, counseling, and empowerment programs in fostering resilience and recovery.

In essence, the literature review underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach to address the psycho-emotional effects of SGBV in Nigeria. The integration of legal frameworks, cultural sensitivity, and mental health support is crucial in developing effective interventions. As Nigeria grapples with this emerging social menace, it is imperative to draw upon these insights to inform policies and initiatives that prioritize the well-being and empowerment of survivors, ultimately fostering a safer and more resilient society.

V. Philosophical Framework

This paper adopts Protection Motivation Theory which was developed by Rogers in 1975, to describe how individuals are motivated to react in a self-protective way towards a perceived health threat. The theory was of the view, that people protect themselves based on two factors: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal assesses the severity of the situation and examines how serious the situation is, while coping appraisal is how one responds to the situation. Threat appraisal consists of the perceived severity of a

threatening event and the perceived probability of the occurrence, or vulnerability. Originally, Protection Motivation Theory proposed to offer conceptual clarity towards the understanding of fear appeals (Rogers, 1975). Core Assumptions and Statements Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1983) is partially based on the work of Lazarus (1966) and Leventhal (1970) and describes adaptive and maladaptive coping with a health threat as a result of two appraisal processes. A process of threat appraisal and a process of coping appraisal, in which the behavioral options to diminish the threat are evaluated (Boer, Seydel, 1996). The appraisal of the health threat and the appraisal of the coping responses result in the intention to perform adaptive responses (protection motivation) or may lead to maladaptive responses. Maladaptive responses are those that place an individual at health risk. They include behaviors that lead to negative consequences (e.g. smoking) and the absence of behaviors, which eventually may lead to negative consequences (e.g. not participating in breast cancer screening and thus missing the opportunity of early detection of a tumor).

The Protection Motivation Theory proposes that the intention to protect oneself depends upon four factors: 1) The perceived severity of a threatened event (e.g., a heart attack) 2) The perceived probability of the occurrence, or vulnerability (in this example, the perceived vulnerability of the individual to a heart attack) 3) The efficacy of the recommended preventive behavior (the perceived response efficacy) 4) The perceived self-efficacy (i.e., the level of confidence in one's ability to undertake the recommended preventive behavior). Protection motivation is the result of the threat appraisal and the coping appraisal. Threat appraisal is the estimation of the chance of contracting a disease (vulnerability) and estimates of the seriousness of a disease (severity). Coping appraisal consists of response efficacy and self-efficacy. Response efficacy is the individual's expectancy that carrying out recommendations can remove the threat. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to execute the recommended courses of action successfully. Protection motivation is a mediating variable whose function is to arouse, sustain and direct protective health behavior (Boer, Seydel, 1996).

Issues, and Trends of Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Nigeria at Glimpse

Violence against women is a gross human rights violation that fractures families and communities and hampers development. However, it has often been misplaced and absent in the dialogues of war and peace. Peace and conflict scholarship has had a bias towards studying war, armed conflict and global terrorism but not intimate terrorism, that is, gender-based violence (Brickell 2015:321, Gregory 2010, Loyd 2012 and Pain 2014). This goes in line with Young (2003: 1210) who said that: "if we are to have a peaceful world ... then the private pain of violence against women must be taken into account and addressed. There can be no peace in its full sense while violence against women continues." Gender based violence has enormous social, economic and productivity costs for individual families, communities and

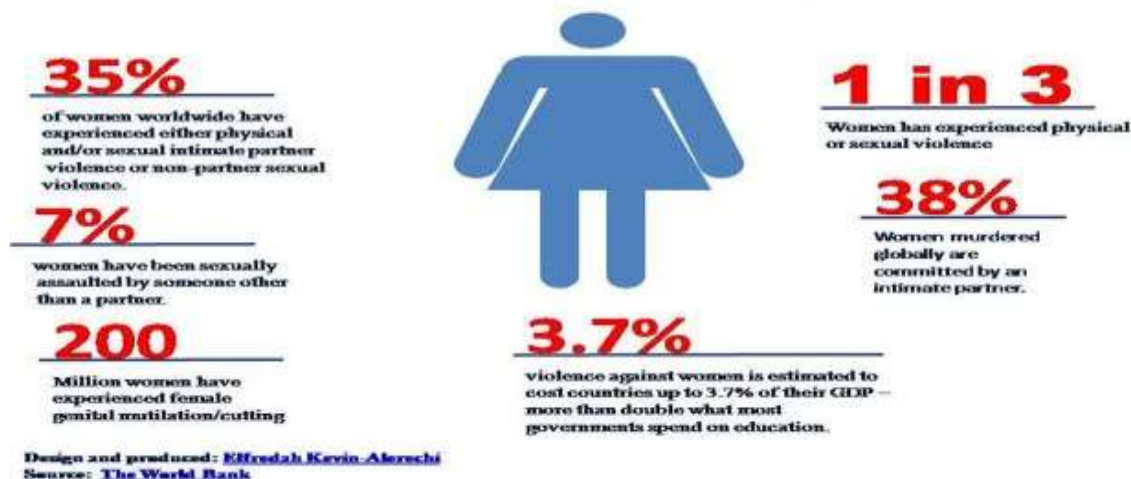


societies. The high incidence of gender-based violence is a major barrier to women’s and girls’ participation and development. The incidence of all forms of violence against women, especially physical and sexual violence continues to be high in Nigeria, despite the strong legal framework (Morna and Chingamuka 2013). According to the Nigeria GBV national strategic plan (2012-2015), the prevalence of domestic violence, that is spousal physical or sexual violence, ranges from 17 per cent in Western Nigeria to 56 per cent in Lagos Metropolitan area. Morna and Chingamuka (2013) argue that gender-based violence campaigns do not reach the majority of the population and further reveal that, in a 2012 study conducted in Nigeria, Violence Against Women (VAW) Baseline Study, only 10 per cent of the 6,600 women and men interviewed in the VAW baseline study were aware of GBV campaigns going on around them, for example, the 16 days of activism campaign in Nigeria. This reflects that if the adult population (the target of such a campaign) is not aware of such campaigns, then the youth are at a greater disadvantage.

Nigeria has improved the laws on gender-based violence and national action plans combating GBV. However, most of the existing gender-based violence policy and interventions have a focus on the adult population and fail to target the foundations of the predicament in its early stages of appearance. Adolescents have received less attention in prevention programs as well as in policy and research. The Nigeria National Gender-based Violence Strategy (2012-2015) acknowledges that programmes that work with youth demonstrate more dramatic and sustainable changes in attitude about the acceptability of GBV. However, there has been little done in engaging youth in and out of school in GBV issues.

Figure 1.1: Women’s Experience with Gender-Based Violence

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



The research aim was to examine the nature of GBV and recognise that reducing violence means providing adequate resources and increasing commitment to youth (Wolfe et al. 1997 and Saffitz 2010: 98). The notion of altering attitudes to change actual or potential behaviour or prevent violence from becoming entrenched behaviour lies behind many interventions, particularly those aimed at young people. For this reason, this study was designed to explore ways to prevent GBV by taking a closer look at young people's attitude towards gender-based violence and their tolerance towards it, in an effort to redirect energies toward pro-active strategies and empower youth to be actively involved in developing an environment free from violence for themselves as well as their peers.

VI. Conclusion

In the tapestry of Nigeria's social landscape, a disconcerting thread weaves its way through the fabric of countless lives the pervasive issue of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). This dark undercurrent poses a profound threat to the well-being of individuals and the collective resilience of the nation. As we delve into the intricate layers of this societal challenge, our focus sharpens on a critical facet often overshadowed the psycho-emotional effects experienced by survivors. This exploration serves not merely as an inquiry into statistics and legislative frameworks but as an intimate journey into the human experience, examining the intricate tapestry of emotions, resilience, and societal impact that define the emerging social menace of SGBV in Nigeria. Through this study, the paper unveil the nuanced narratives, challenge prevailing norms, and lay the groundwork for informed interventions that go beyond the surface of this complex issue, acknowledging the depth of its impact on individuals and the collective soul of the nation. In order to develop appropriate strategies to deal with GBV, this study made use of the protection motivation theory.

VII. Recommendations

We should not doubt that marginalized populations like youth can transform societies. Therefore, interventions need to capitalize on working with young people rather than working on them.

A lot of researchers have highlighted that there is need to promote interventions that address gender role and relationship issues, masculinity/femininity as a strategy to prevent violence, particularly, gender-based violence. Only a few interventions have been doing this, meaning that, mostly this has been a recommendation of researchers. Taking into consideration that there is a paucity of effective interventions that deal with this problem and addressing young people as a population, it is crucial that there is the development of more interventions, especially broad communication campaigns with a focus on gender roles and relations. And those strategies that appear to be promising should be tested and implemented on a wider scale.

Those addressing gender-based violence from the fields of social work, particularly government departments and non-governmental organizations dealing with anti-violence projects should turn their efforts to school-based programs such as Gender-Based Violence Prevention Education Program, that seek to prevent GBV by using a more systematic approach that has cross fertilization between conflict transformation and violence prevention strategies.

No form of violence is justifiable, therefore, workshops or campaigns should be packaged or delivered within the context of peace messages or, “no to violence” messages. There is need for national campaigns that expand from adult gender-based violence campaigns to the development of education campaigns that have young people at the center. In other words, campaigns designed for young people. Once these education campaigns have been developed, service-delivery mechanisms, such as schools, need to hold training programs.

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