

THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON VULNERABLE GROUPS IN LAGOS COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Sexual violence is considered a serious violation of human rights and is a widespread phenomenon that does not discriminate based on race, religion, ethnicity or language. Sexual violence against women is a social problem that occurs within the immediate social setting, has serious consequences affecting the victims' physical, emotional, health, and social well-being. Sexual violence against women deprives them of their right to participate in societal life and holds them ineffective in the immediate social settings such as family, kinship, social norms and values shared by the majority. This study evaluated the effects of sexual violence on the vulnerable groups in Lagos communities. An interview technique was used to collect data. A total of fifty-five participants were purposively selected for the interview due to their vast knowledge on the topic under study. Findings revealed that sexual violence has a major impact on women and hinders their full inclusion and participation in social life, sexual violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. Sexual violence against women is an act of gender-based violence that affects women physically, sexually, psychologically and emotionally and most of the victims of sexual violence are not given swift justice and attention they required. Recommendations include; government should equip sexual violence first responders to enhance their capacities and capabilities in combating sexual violence, should provide support and empower victims and survivors of sexual violence, should establish partnerships and collaboration with law enforcement officials and the judiciary in addressing sexual violence, the law makers to legislate stringent laws that can be used in combating sexual violence and need for the domestication of sexual offences rated law in Lagos and all states in Nigeria.

Keywords: Effects, Sexual Violence, Vulnerable Groups, Women and Lagos

Introduction

Violence against women is an act of gender-based violence that affects women physically, sexually, psychologically and emotionally. It includes threats of coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty that occur in public or private life. Sexual violence is prevalent in Nigeria and it is a global phenomenon without cultural, geographic, religious, social, economic and national boundaries. The perpetrators use threats or physical force to compel victims to engage in a sexual act (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010). Globally, it has been estimated that one of three women has experienced physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. Sexual violence undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims, yet, it remains shrouded in a culture of

silence. Victims of sexual violence suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections and diseases, even death (Gelles, 2008).

Sexual violence is an absolute violation of human rights that deprives women of their safety, value, dignity, self-worth and the right to enjoy their liberty and threat to peace and survival of most victims in different communities around Lagos. Most sexual violence victims do not get swift justice. Victims are neglected by the criminal justice system and the government, in some cases, victims are not given adequate attention and the assistance they require. This study focuses on the different communities in Lagos, including Kosofe, Ikeja, Lagos Island, Alimosho, Oshodi Isolo and Eti-osa. The rationale for choosing these communities were due to the demographics and population composition. An interview technique was used for data collection. Fifty participants were purposively selected for the interview due to their vast knowledge on the topic under study. The participants included five officials from the police, five from the court and prosecuting authorities, five from the non-governmental organisations and twenty victims of sexual violence were interviewed. The study identifies reasons for sexual violence against women, the effects and consequences of sexual violence against women, and the role played by the criminal justice system in addressing sexual violence.

The following questions will be answered in this study

- i. What are the factors that contribute to sexual violence against women?
- ii. What are the effects and consequences of sexual violence against women?
- iii. What is the legal framework to address sexual violence?
- iv. What are the roles played by the criminal justice system in addressing sexual violence?

Concept of sexual violence against women

Sexual violence is actual or threat of physical force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act against his/her will. It is an attempted or completed sex act with a person unable to understand the act as a rape. Psychological abuse and emotional violence are referred to as harm to the victim that is caused by acts like humiliating, calling of names, insults, embarrassing the victim intentionally in public, controlling victims' movement and activities, isolating the victim from friends and family, threatening to harm a child or pet, controlling financial resources, withholding information or resources (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010). Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victims, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (Wang, 2005).

The key word in the definition of sexual violence is coercion, which covers the entire range of level of force. The force includes physical force, psychological intimidation, blackmail or other forms of threat such as a threat of physical harm, or being dismissed from a job or not obtaining a job that is sought. Sometimes, the victim is unable to give consent as in the case of drunkenness, the influence of drug, when one is asleep or mentally incapacitated. Sexual violence also implies that someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Usually, abusers can be acquaintances, family members, and trusted individuals or strangers (Olson and Defrain, 2006).

The United Nations declaration on the elimination of violence against women (1993) defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The Declaration defines violence against women using three perspectives, including violence that occurs in the family, within community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State (United Nations, 1993). Violence is the intentional use of physical force with the intention for causing injury, harm, disability or death. Domestic violence can also be defined as an abuse in intimacy. It can be physical, sexual, psychological and emotional or threats of physical or sexual violence that are inflicted on women (Olson and Defrain, 2006). Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation.

Forms of violence against women

Domestic violence can come in the form of physical injuries and other consequences from domestic violence are sexual abuse and gender inequalities. Physical and sexual abuse can lead to gynaecological problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease, chronic pelvic pain and vaginal bleeding among other medical problems (Lagos State Government Ministry of Women Affairs & Poverty Alleviation, 2013). Physical violence is the intentional use of force for example kicking, plucking out hair with force slapping, pushing, biting, choking and using knife, gun and other weapons with the motive of causing injury or death. It also includes coercing other people to commit such acts that can be actual or threatening (Gelles, 2008).

Another form of domestic violence is sexual violence, which can be said to be actual or threats of physical force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act against his/her will. Attempted or completed sex act with a person unable to understand as rape with an object (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010). Psychological abuse and emotional violence are referred to as harm to the victim that is caused by acts like humiliating, calling of names, insults, embarrassing the victim intentionally in public, controlling victims' movement and activities, isolating the victim from friends and family, threatening to harm a child or pet, controlling financial resources,

withholding information or resources (Wang, 2005). Economic abuse is when the abuser has a complete control over the victim's money and other economic resources. Usually involves putting the victim on a strict allowance, withholding money at will and forcing the victim to beg for the money until the abuser gives them some money (Olson and Defrain, 2006). The World Health Organisation (1993) published the first world's report on Domestic violence and developed a life cycle typology of violence against women based on their cultural life cycles.

The World Health Organisation (1996) presented a typology of violence, though not uniformly accepted, can be useful in understanding the context in which violence occurs and the interactions between types of violence. This typology distinguishes four modes in which violence can be inflicted: physical; sexual; and psychological attack; and deprivation. It further divides the general definition of violence into three sub-types of victim-perpetrator relationship. First, self-directed violence refers to violence in which the perpetrator and victim are the same individual and is subdivided into self-abuse and suicide. Interpersonal violence refers to violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner violence and community violence (Bloom & Shelah, 2008). The former category includes child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into acquaintance and stranger violence and includes youth violence; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions. Collective violence refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals.

According to Wang (2005) sex selective abortion is the effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes; female infanticide is the physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Another typology of violence includes female genital mutilation, which is physical, sexual and psychological abuse, child prostitution and pornography. Furthermore, dating and courtship violence e.g. acid throwing and date rape; economically coerced sex e.g. school girls have sex with "sugar daddies" in return for school fees; Incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide, psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities and forced pregnancy (Lussier and Jesse, 2016).

Theories of political, social and propensity to violence

Organised violence is patterned and deliberate, it is one means of social combat and spontaneous violence is an unplanned explosion set off by a unique chemistry of internal and external conditions. Spontaneous violence is collective or individual. Organized violence is both instrumental and impersonal, spontaneous violence is reactive, compensatory, or gratuitous. As a reaction, it is a way of striking out directly against frustration. As a compensation, it is a way of making up for frustrations suffered in the past. As gratuitous violence, it is a way of displacing aggression from an object which cannot be attacked because it is too powerful or because it generates ambivalent feelings to an object, which is too weak to resist and that arouses clear

feelings. The third type of violence is pathological violence, which is committed by individuals and has a basis in either physical or mental illness (Lussier and Jesse, 2016).

Organized violence is divided into criminal and political types. Criminal violence, while impersonal or instrumental, is not directed at the defence, disruption or restoration of a normative order, although it is unwittingly contributing to such outcomes. Political violence is directed at the maintenance or change of a normative order. Political violence addresses itself to changing the very system of social norms, which police power is designed to protect. Political violence can also concern itself with maintaining the normative order under attack.

However, Joyal et al. (2007) stated that the distinctions between criminal and political violence and organised and spontaneous violence are not clear because all acts of violence, whether or not they are deliberate, can be used for some political purpose. A rise in criminal violence can become an excuse for officials to change the normative system. Criminal bands can become social bandits and finally guerilla movements. Similarly, it is difficult to distinguish between organised and spontaneous violence. Officials can interpret a riot as a political conspiracy, while oppositionists can interpret a riot as part of a movement for change (Joyal et al. 2007).

The propensity approach to sexual aggression focuses on the trait features that are stable and fixed over time that can increase the probability that someone will commit an act of sexual violence. Polaschek and Gannon (2004) assert that the cognitive traits and attitudinal biases have been associated with propensity that increases the probability for an offender to commit violence acts. The sexual aggression theory emanates from socio-cultural research that says that forms of sexual aggression come from false beliefs of gender relations, misdirected objectives that are only dating to have sex, and erroneous impressions of social interactions linked to gender relations. According to Polaschek and Gannon (2004), the cognitive biases that add to one's propensity to commit acts of sexual violence include the belief that women are sex objects; men's sexual drive is uncontrollable; a feeling of entitlement to sex; society is dangerous; and that women are unpredictable and dangerous. Furthermore, Polaschek and Gannon (2004) pointed out that the neuropsychological deficits that contribute to a propensity for sexual assault include difficulties in self-regulation, executive functioning problems, perception/memory system problems, arousal/motivation system deficits, and problems in the action selection system.

These difficulties arise according to Bamford (2016) when sexual aggressors cannot understand their emotional state and when confronted with a situation that triggers their arousal and motivation systems, they become confused and have difficulties controlling their behaviour. Propensity approach to sexual aggression is based on the idea that sexual aggression indicates problems starting and managing enjoyable intimate relationship. Joyal et al. (2007) stated that some factors that contributed to sexual violence, which includes; inability to adapt plans to deal with unforeseen situations or having limited problem-solving skills, the action selection system and maintaining maladaptive beliefs categorised by erroneous interpretations of social encounters,

perception and memory systems contribute to a greater susceptibility to commit acts of sexual violence (Marshall et al. 2000).

Lussier and Jesse (2016) argued that the deviant sexual orientation propensity model suggests that people who perpetrate acts of sexual violence are sexually aroused by non-consensual sexual interactions more than consensual sexual interactions. Moreover, Bamford (2016) views perpetrators of sexual violence through different personality traits, with interpersonal functioning being the most important factor to ascertain whether a person has a higher propensity for sexual violence or not.

Factors that contribute to sexual violence

Most respondents 70% agreed that several complex and interconnected institutionalised social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to violence attacks. They affirmed the factors that contribute to unequal power relations include socioeconomic forces, the family institution where power relations are enforced, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of men. Factors that contribute to sexual violence against women included legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status.

The study reveals that most of the victims have experienced all types of violence from their partners at different stages of their lives. The male forced their female counterpart into having sex without their consent. The victims narrated they have been married for many years, and their husbands supported by family members meted violent behaviour towards them. One of the causes of sexual violence against women is violent behaviour of male partners against their female partners as a result of the victimisation, most female have left their marital homes.

Most respondents 55% agreed that without economic independence, women have no power to escape from an abusive relationship. They pointed out that increasing economic activity and independence of women's is viewed as a threat that leads to increased male violence. It was gathered that sexual violence is precipitated by drunkenness. The rise in violence is linked to the destabilisation of economic patterns in society; macro-economic policies such as structural adjustment programmes, globalisation, and the growing inequalities are linked to increasing levels of violence in several regions in Africa.

Most of the respondents converged prevalence of hardship, poverty, unemployment, income inequality, stress, and alcohol abuse have led to increased violence in society in general, including violence against women. They argued that these factors increased women's vulnerability by encouraging more risk-taking behaviour, more alcohol and drug abuse, the breakdown of social support networks, and the economic dependence of women on their partners.

Most respondents 55% pointed out that cultural ideologies in both industrialised and developing countries provide legitimacy for violence against women in certain circumstances. They viewed religion and traditions in the past have sanctioned the chastising and beating of wives. They pointed out that physical punishment of wives was sanctioned under the notion of entitlement and ownership of women. Furthermore, the male control of family wealth inevitably places decision-making authority in male hands, leading to male dominance and proprietary rights over women and girls.

Majority of respondents unanimously agreed that sexual violence against women is perpetrated by a drunken partner, husband, close friends and relatives. The police investigators confirmed that most of the sexual violence cases handled by them happened when a husband (partner) gets drunk, the female partners complain that, whenever the male partners get drunk, they become violent, but in the normal days when they are drunk they tend to behave normally.

Effects and consequences of sexual violence

The effect of sexual violence comes in the form of minor or serious conditions, such as bruises, cuts, and broken bones, injuries to private and outer parts of the body of the victims. Physical effects of sexual violence include vaginal bleeding or pelvic pain, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, having trouble sleeping and having nightmares. Whenever a victim of sexual violence becomes pregnant, the injury incurred affects her and the unborn child.

Violence against women is linked to long-term health problems including; arthritis, asthma, chronic pain, digestive problems such as stomach ulcers, heart problems, irritable bowel syndrome, nightmares and problems sleeping, migraine headaches, sexual problems such as pain during sex, stress, perception and problems with the immune system.

Sexual violence victims suffer effects of trauma, which interferes with victim's ability to perform effectively at work or other activities. The study revealed that most victims of sexual assault and violence have quit their jobs as the result the effects of violence. The serious risk of physical abuse is that it precedes into concussion and traumatic brain injury due to injuries sustained by hitting the victim on the head or when the victim falls and hit her head on an object. Other effects of traumatic brain injury cause headache or a feeling of pressure, loss of consciousness, confusion, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, slurred speech, memory loss, trouble concentrating, sleeplessness. The study reveals that some of the symptoms of traumatic brain injury takes a few days to show up, over a longer time, causes depression and anxiety, affect victim's thoughts, impairs victim's ability to plan and conduct activities.

Most respondents agreed that, sexual violence affects the mental health of the victim, after the victim has experienced physical or sexual assault is affected emotionally, develops fear, confusion, anger and numb. Also, victims of sexual violence develop feelings of guilt or shamed over attack or victimisation.

Sexual violence has health effects such as pregnancy and gynaecological complications, sexually transmitted diseases, and mental health; psychological effects: suicidal behaviour, depression, nightmares and flashbacks. Victims develop a feeling of social ostracisation, difficulties in concentrating, anxiety, phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, low self-esteem; resort to substance use and abuse; experience emotional effects; guilt, shame, self-blame, embarrassment, fear, distrust, sadness, vulnerability, isolation, lack of control, anger, numbness, confusion, shock, disbelief and denial.

Sexual violence occurs in various forms such as rape within marriage or dating relationship; rape by strangers and gang rape; systemic rape in armed conflicts; unwanted sexual advances or harassment including demand for sex in exchange for favours; unwanted touching; sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people; sexual abuse of children; forced marriage or cohabitation including the marriage of children; denial of the right to use contraceptives and forced abortions.

Most respondents agreed that sexual violence compromises the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspections for virginity; forced prostitution and trafficking of people for sexual exploitation showing one's genitals or naked body to others without consent; masturbating in public; watching someone in a private act without their knowledge or permission.

The study revealed that victims are exposed to post-traumatic stress disorder due to stress or trauma because of sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence experience depression start to become anxious about everything, unable to trust others and have low self-esteem. It was revealed that some victims of sexual violence try to cope with the trauma and stress by over-eating, smoking, resort to drinking alcohol, substance and drug abuse, which alleviate victims to feel better in the moment, but ends up making them feel worse in the long-term.

The socio-economic costs of sexual violence against include direct cost value of services used in treating or preventing violence such as medical, police, criminal justice system, housing, social services. Non-monetary costs include; pain and suffering, increased morbidity, increased mortality through homicide and suicide, abuse of alcohol and drugs, depressive disorders. Furthermore, economic multiplier impacts macro-economic, labour market, inter-generational productivity, impacts decreased labour, market participation, reduced productivity on the job. Social multiplier effect impact on interpersonal relations and quality of life, intergenerational transmission of violence, reduced quality of life, erosion of social capital, reduced participation in democratic process.

Conclusion

The study reveals that sexual violence has a significant impact on the lives of the victims of crime in the area of health, safety, self-esteem, and their ability to participate in society. Sexual

violence has a negative impact on the lives and development of children, either as a result of witnessing violence against their mothers or other significant women in their lives or because they themselves have witnessed violent crime. Also, most of the victims have experienced all types of violence from their partners at different stages of their lives. The male forced their female counterpart into having sex without their consent. When sexual aggressors cannot understand their emotional state and when confronted with a situation that triggers their arousal and motivation systems, they become confused and have difficulties controlling their behaviour, thus involved in sexual violence.

Recommendations

The study recommends that strategies that can be adopted in preventing sexual violence against the vulnerable in society are the collective initiative by men and women, preventive actions and prosecution of offenders of sexual violence.

The policy makers, government, criminal justice management and law makers should intensify effort towards prevention and combating of sexual violence in the state should adopt proactive measures in detecting early occurrence of sexual violence and preventing it from escalating to uncontrollable crisis in our society. Need to reduce difficulty victims of sexual violence, face while seeking redress and justice. There is a need for the criminal justice and role players to synergize to promote efficient and effective sexual violence prevention. A holistic approach is needed to addressing sexual violence in all communities in Lagos.

There is a need to train the first responders who can provide the first-level survivor-centered response in the form of psychosocial support, first aid, and referral to services to the victims of sexual violence. It is essential to train care givers on confidentiality and protocol to respect a survivor's decision regarding follow-up actions in both legal and other matters.

There is a need for counseling and empowerment of victims of sexual violence who have been exposed to post-traumatic stress disorder due to stress or trauma. Victims of sexual violence who experienced depression should be given special medical attention to alleviate the effects of sexual violence.

Need to establishing grievance redress mechanism and social accountability framework that would use innovative citizen engagement platforms that allow confidential reporting, especially through technological tools and other communication platforms, such as mobile phones, radios, and dry erase boards. The response mechanism should be in line with the urgency of the complaint. Sexual violence cases should be escalated to the state and federal project coordinating units and to the federal task team leader for a real-time response.

There is a need to for collaboration between the law enforcement officials and the judiciary to enhance victim assistance, empowerment and support and justice for the victims. Partnership is

vital because these officials are aware of existing laws to protect and support victims seeking redress.

Government should design-sensitive projects that will reduce risks of sexual violence and ensure effective sexual violence prevention and response mechanisms. When designing the project, there is a need to ensure that families, including husbands, are aware of the project's aims, objectives, activities, and benefits. Modalities should be put in place to ensure that information gets to the most vulnerable through multiple communication channels. Government should involve community members, religious leaders, community groups, and male gatekeepers for project buy-in. Need for the domestication of the domestic and gender violence law in Lagos and all states of Nigeria. Community efforts should include prevention campaigns aimed at changing public attitudes towards sexual violence using various media platforms. The media and non-governmental organisations need to be actively involved in the campaign against sexual violence.

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