

An International Journal
of Psychology in Africa

Ife PsychologIA

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY



Vol. 22 No. 1, 2014

*Published by the Ife Centre
for Psychological Studies*

Gender Based Violence: A Nigeria Experience

Rachel Bolaji Asagba PhD

Department of Psychology
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ibadan, Ibadan
Oyo State, Nigeria

Email Address rbasagba@yahoo.com

The paper has examined the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria. It was discovered that violence against women is a common phenomenon in society and that the majority of the Nigerian people do not consider it a problem or crime. The paper recommended aggressive education and training that cuts across every strata of the society. Furthermore, it insisted that a collective measure that comprises all stakeholders such as the local, state and federal government as well as all the international agencies are required for the effective eradication of Gender based Violence in Nigeria.

Gender based violence (GBV) is known as Violence Against Women (VAW). The two would be used interchangeably in this paper.

According to a paper from the United Nations in 1997, gender based violence, is *"any act of gender based violence the results of which is likely to result in physical sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life (WHO,2005)*

From this definition, GBV refers to different forms of harmful behaviours directed against women and girls as result of their sex. There are therefore many types of GBV; physical and psychological. These could be in the form of wife battering, torture, early force marriage, sexual harassment, assault or rape, female genital mutilation (FGM) widowhood and inheritance, human trafficking, violence against women and legal constraints, kidnapping or Abduction, Acid bathing and so on.

GBV predominantly occurs worldwide despite the provision for equal rights and status as stipulated in international legal instruments which have dealt extensively with this issue. These legal instruments include:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1945
2. The Convention the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979

3. The Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993.

4. The Vienna Declaration and World Conference on Human Right

5. The platform for Action from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing.

All those instruments established that any type of GBV is a violation or abuse of women's rights (Kira, 2004).

In spite of these efforts which were ratified by many countries, violence against women is on the increase. This was attested by the UN General Secretary: *"Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives of their families, and society as a whole. Most societies inhibit such violence-yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned"*. (Ban Ki-Moon, 2007)

Rand [1997] noted that cases of domestic violence are the most prevalent of all forms of GBV. It is observed to be a major international social and public health problem, regardless of the economic status of the nation UN [2006]

Globalization has subjected many countries in the world today to economic and social pressures, which affect the behaviour of many individuals. It is estimated that about 50% of the world's female population have suffered some form of abuse at some point in their lifetime from someone related to them (Reprowatch,

2000). The UN also estimated that at least one in every three women suffers domestic violence in form of being coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime from the hands of those who claim to either protect or love them; the abuser is usually known to them (UN, 2006). Millions of women and girls suffer from violence in times of peace as well as war. These can occur at the hands of state or in the home. Resultantly, women are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed, usually with impunity (WHO, 2013; Lawson, 2003; Dutton, 2006).

Likewise, Otoo-Oyortey (10) commented on the response to this worldwide problem. He lamented that even though more than 166 countries have ratified the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of violence against women and have made provisions to protect women against violence in their constitution and criminal codes, only 44 countries particularly protect women against domestic violence.

The collaboration of the leadership of countries with the UN to take primary, secondary and tertiary preventive measures is urgently required. This paper gives an overview of gender based violence with some cases in Nigeria and highlights some ways forward in reducing all forms of gender based violence in Nigeria, if not totally eliminating them.

Overview of GBV

It has been well noted that:

"Violence against women is a serious cause of death and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined" (CWDR, 1993)

Websdale [1999] observed that one in every five women faces some types of violence during her life time leading to serious injury or death in some cases. Annually in the USA, 1000-1600 women die at the hands of their male partner. This follows a long escalating pattern of battering in most cases (CWDR, 1993). Robinson [2002] noted that in North America, there still is a high prevalence despite the fact that women have equal rights and status. He also discovered that forty to fifty-one percent of women experience so many form of violence

in their lifetime which includes child abuse, physical violence rape and domestic violence.

The yearly prevalence of domestic violence in Canada was found to be between 0.4% and 23% with severe violence ranging between 2% and 10% (Clark & Mont, 2003). In Mexico, where there is no legislation specifically against such violence, a 1995 survey by the Mexican Association against violence revealed that 74% of the abused individuals were women. A study on 200,000 cases of abuse by partners in Spain similarly revealed that women are usually the victims and of domestic violence [Galindo & Serrano, 1994].

The lifetime prevalence of domestic violence against women in the United Kingdom was stated as 39% and 60% in two different studies (McGibbon, Cipper & Kelly, 1989; Stanko, Crip, Hale & Lucraft, 1997). Another survey conducted in the community revealed that 23% of women had ever been physically assaulted by a partner or former partner and 4% had been so assaulted within the last 12 months (Mirrlees-Black, 1999). In Serbia the online survey conducted by the staff of the SOS hot line for women and children victims of violence indicated that about 94% callers were victims of violence from family members or intimate partners (Misevic & Hughes, 1990-1993).

A study in Korea indicated that domestic violence such as wife battering occurred more than once in a month but the survey conducted by the Korean women hot line revealed that 42% of those interviewed had been assaulted more than a once in a week (Wha-Soon, 1994). In Bangladesh, a study carried out in a rural area of Bhurya in 2000 indicated that 50.8% of the women admitted to being victims of battering from their husbands and 2.1% were abused by other family members (Bhuiya, Sharmin & Hanifi, 2003). In India, a survey conducted among 1842 rural women of reproductive age revealed that both men and women considered wife beating acceptable and that 40% of the wives have been beaten by their husbands (Otoo-Oyortey, 2003).

In Africa, violence is not only the common practice. It is also socially

accepted. For instance, violence against women by their male partner is widely condoned by many African societies. This is due to the belief that men are superior and that the women with whom they live are seen as possessions to be treated as they deem fit (Kiragu, 1995; UNCSDDHA, 1993). In South Africa, a cross-sectional study on the prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of 1306 women revealed that the lifetime prevalence of experiencing physical violence from a current or ex-husband or boyfriends was 24.6% and 9.5% of the women in the study had been assaulted within the period of one year (Jewkes, Levin & Penn-kekana, 2003). In Uganda, a survey conducted among 5190 women of reproductive age in the Rakai District indicated that 30% of women had experienced physical threats or physical abuse from their current partner (Koeing et al., 2006). In Ghana, a cross-sectional survey of women and children revealed that violence is still on the increase, an average rate of domestic violence being 54.5% (Obeng, 2003)

Overview of GBV in Nigeria

From the global overview above, it is certainly obvious that GBV cuts across countries with the degree differing from society to society, women taking the lion share of the suffering and pain. As a result of traditional practices in Nigeria and in many other African countries, the beating of wives and children for instance is widely accepted as form of discipline (UNICEF, 2001). Parents believe that beating their children is the way to instil discipline in them, much the same way as husbands beat their wives who are considered as their possessions (Kiragu, 1995; UNCSDDHA, 1993).

The African society is basically patriarchal and the woman's place within the scheme is decidedly subordinate. This can be observed in the usual prayer for a girl each morning after greetings that God would allow her to find a good husband to take care of her. During traditional marriage ceremonies, the prayer for husband is that he would be able to provide good care for his bride. This kind of socialization takes place on a regular basis in Nigeria. Domestic violence therefore

functions as a means of enforcing conformity. The role of a woman within customary society as well as in religious practices where the husband is known to be the head of family, gives him the power to exert over all. It thus does not matter if the woman is economically dependent or not. Her position, like that of the children, is subordinate.

GBV is generally regarded as family affair which has to remain solely at home, without outside interference. The victims have no option but to remain silence when considering the stigma attached and the response from the law enforcement agencies, which usually reinforce the act. For instance Shija [2006] observed that in Nigeria, an average of 300-500 women are killed annually by their husbands, ex-partners, lovers or male relations and in most cases, the police still consider them to be family affairs to be settled at home (29).

McDonnel [2006] noted that Nigerian do not discuss domestic violence because they consider it to be a part of marriage that must be kept secret. He made known that 40 percent of the women who participated in studies conducted both in Lagos and Ibadan urban settings have been victims of domestic violence (30). Similar findings were also obtained from project Alert in 2001: In both Lagos and Oyo states, studies on violence against working women, market women as well as female secondary school and university students revealed that 64.4% of the 45 women interviewed in the workplace confirmed that they had been beaten by their partner or husband while 56, 6% of 45 interviewed market women admitted same (Project Alert, 2001).

Obi and Ozunba [2007] conducted a study on domestic violence in South East Nigeria and found that 70% of the interviewee claimed to be abused in their family. Also, in the annual report on violence against women in Nigeria by project Alert there was an increase in cases, with 169 cases between 2002 and 2003 as against 142 cases reported for the two previous years. The pattern indicated the following: physical assault and murder- 73 cases, domestic violence- 40 cases, rape/sexual assault- 32 cases, kidnap/abduction- 21cases and acid bathing- 3cases. Unfortunately, accurate

data is not possible because of unreported cases. The media report in November 2005 indicated: rape/ incest- 46, domestic violence -43, murder of women -40, kidnap/abduction-19, acid bathing -10 (Project Alert,2004). Oyeniran and Isiugo [2005]'s findings on women's perception of wife-beating in Nigeria revealed that 64.4% of women who had ever married and 50.4% of unmarried women felt that wife beating was alright. This showed clearly that many people view wife-beating as normal in Nigeria. It was also discovered that some women who had been abused do not even realize it (Afro/News, 2007).

Overview of Some Cases in Nigeria

Case One

The Punch Nigerian Newspaper reported an acid attack with the intent to kill involving Mr. O. M., the alleged attacker on F. A., the victim, who was rendered blind. It was brought to the court on December 30, 2011 at aboru, Lagos [Eniola, 2012].

Case Two

Another report from Punch Newspaper revealed that a man, U.S., murdered his wife, A., after beating her throughout the night in their residence in Rivers State [Aasike, 2012].

Case Three

D. S. was another man who poured acid on his fiancé, C. E., a university student who had to be hospitalized in the Lagos State Technology Hospital (LASUTH) with massive tissue destruction involving her face, chest and other parts of her body [Ifeyanyi, 2012].

Case Four

As reported by the premium Times, 50 year old man, O. T. in Ondo State was sent to prison by the Magistrate Court for killing his 40 year old wife, A.T. [Abimbola, 2013].

Case Five

The PM News reported that a man named M. Y. murdered his wife on the 17th of the November 2011 for refusing to have sex with him. He was sent to the prison by the Ilorin Magistrate Court [PM News, 2012].

Case Six

As documented by the African Examiner online, in 2010, the King of Akure, Ondo state, Oba Oluwadare Adesina beat his wife, Olori Bolanle in public and sprayed a substance believed to be acid on her. She was hospitalized and the king was eventually disposed.

Case Seven

The Prime Times reported that a man, A. A., murdered his wife, T. A., a banker and mother of one, in their home in Lagos. He was charged to court on June 24, 2011 [Olurounbi, 2012]. The following cases [from nine to thirteen] were reported by Amnesty International on 03 May 2007:

Case Eight

"Fatima", a domestic worker aged 12years old, was reported to have been doused with kerosene and set on fire after she was accused of stealing meat from her employer. The alleged perpetrator was charged in connection with her death, but the outcome of the case is not known

Case Nine

"Shehi" said that she was regularly subjected to violence by her husband. After one such act, she was left permanently blind in her left eye. Her husband had reportedly suspected her of having a sexual relationship outside their marriage. She obtained a dissolution of the marriage from the Lagos High Court and later sought damages for the grievous bodily harm.

Case Ten

"Ronke" from Lagos, died from injuries after she had acid throw over her, allegedly by her husband's younger brother. Her husband had died from a stroke but when she attended his funeral in Delta State, she was apparently "accused of wanting to kill/him"

Case Eleven

"Women reported in the news media to have been killed by their husband in Lagos have included 22-years-old "Tunde" allegedly beaten to death in 2003, "Abiola" in July 2003; and "Amina," who allegedly died

before she could receive medical treatment for a severe beating on 18 June 2001.

Case Twelve

"A middle-aged teacher with a university degree was brought by her sister after she collapsed from the last set of battering by her husband. Her husband had just left her on the floor. She was advised to go to the police but she wanted to go home for the children and did not want to prosecute. She kept being beaten and went to LUTH (Lagos University Teaching Hospital) to have an operation where they removed a clot of blood ... (her husband was suspected to be jealous of her success)".

Case Thirteen

"The nurse fled to a friend's house and stayed there until the family begged her to come back home. On her return, she was not beaten but was verbally abused. When her seven year-old daughter was raped by a neighbour, the problems of the man beating his wife increased. After examination, the father preferred to settle financially with the neighbour rather than carry out the necessary tests or prosecute. (Amnesty International, 2007)

All the above cases had further confirmed the Amnesty International (2005) report on the violence against women in Nigeria:

"on the daily basis, women are beaten and ill-treated for supposed transgressions, raped and even murdered by members of their family. In some cases, vicious acid attacks leave them with horrific disfigurements. Such violence is too frequently excused and tolerated in communities and not denounced. Husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence against women" (Amnesty International, 2007)

The Way Forward

Provision of education or training on reproductive and human rights should be aggressively made available to all strata of the society. The focus of the training should be based on preventive measures. There should be compulsory courses on reproductive and human rights at all levels

of education and every teacher should be trained through seminars and workshops because they cannot give out correct information if they do not have any. Similarly, traditional and religious leaders should be trained because they play an important role in upholding culture and values. Every cadre of professionals as well as market women should also be trained. Organizations and associations in Nigeria would also benefit from such education. Since gender inequality is a part of the Nigerian norm, change cannot come overnight. It has to be gradual process. The media need to be involved.

International bodies such as UNICEF, WHO, National Coalition Against Violence (NCADV), Department for International Development (DFID) and Women Empowerment Against Violence (WEAVE) e.t.c. should work in collaboration with the government at every level in order to achieve the desired change. The WHO launched and released a guideline on 20 June 2013 with the *"aim to help countries improved their health sector's capacity to respond to violence against women"* (WHO, 2013). This is a welcome gesture. There is further need for collaboration with the government to fight this cankerworm of society. Most important of all, the law Empowerment Agencies as well as members of legislature should be sensitized. Welfare for victims should be urgently provided. This would include shelter as well as support available in every town in Nigeria to enable them obtain counselling and protection. Presently, there are no established services in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper examined the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in Nigeria which, like in many African countries and indeed globally, is a common practice with grave effects. This menace is mitigated by perception of GBV as being a normal phenomenon in the Nigerian society, making it very difficult to report and handle such cases. The paper has therefore demonstrated the need for aggressive action in order to protect women and human rights. There is the need to effect a change in the mindset of the society regarding women. Specific measures in training and

reorienting every stratum of the Nigerian society are required in order to permanently reduce, if not eliminate Gender based violence. This must be done as a collective measure involving all the stakeholders such as the local, state and federal levels of government as well as international Agencies in order to achieve effective change in Nigeria.

References

- Dutton, D G (2006) Rethinking Domestic Violence, Vancouver, BL, Canada: UBC Press.
- Lawson, D (2003) "Incidence Explanations and Treatment of partner Violence. *Journal of Counselling and Development* 81, 19-53.
- Reprowatch [2000] Half World Women are victims of domestic violence.23[5-6];6
- Robinson LF (2002) Violence Against Women in America, Arch.Women Mental Health 6;185-91
- United Nation (2006) General Assemble in Death study on All forms of Violence Against Women, Report of the Secretary General, 2006
- Websdale N (1999) Understanding Domestic Homicide Boston North Eastern University Press
- WHO (2013) Responding to intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Against Women Who Clinical And Policy Guidelines
- World Development Report (1993) Investing in Health, New York Oxford University Press.
- Otoo-Oyortey, NA (1997) Battered Woman Needs more than Biological Help 1PPF-Med Bull, 31 (3) 5-6
- Abimbola Ayobami [2012] Premium Times February 18
- African Examiner On-line[2011] Domestic Violence Police Grills Deji of, Akure Retrieved July 25, 2011 from <http://www.africanexaminer.com/deji05>
- Afro/News (2007) Half of Nigeria Women Experience Domestic Violence. Retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.afro.com>
- Akasike[2013] Punch Newspaper January
- Amnesty International (2005)
- Amnesty International (2007) Nigeria's Unheard Voices available at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/indeN/en.gaFr.440>
- Amnesty International[2007] Nigeria's Unheard Voices Widespread violence against Women in the family
- Banki- Moon (2007) Speech Report from the UN Secretary General
- Bhuiya A. Sharmin T, Hanifi S M (2003) Nature of Domestic Violence Against Women in a Rural Areas of Bangladesh: Implication for Preventive Interventions *J. Health Popul. Nutr.* 21 (1) 48-54.
- Clark J R Du Mont J.C (2003) Intimate Partner Violence and Health; Critique of Canadian Prevalence studies *Canadian J. Public Health* 94 (1) 52-8.5.
- Galindo E, Serrano N (1994) Women in the World. *Women Health News* August 23:8
- Eniola Ainkuotu[2012] Punch Newspaper March 22
- Ifeanyi Okolie[2012] Vanguard Newspaper November 26
- Jewkes R, Levin J, Penn-Kekana L (2000) Risk factors for Domestic Violence; Findings from A South Africa cross-sectional study *Sec.Sci. Med.* 55: 1603-17
- Kira I (2004) Assessing and Responding to Secondary Traumatization in the survivors families *Torture* 14: 38-45
- Kiragu, J (1995) "HIV Prevention and Women's Rights: Working for one means working for Both AIDS Captions, November Vol.11 No.3
- Koeing MA ,Ahmed,SR,Hossain MB,MozumberMKA (2003)"Individual and Community Level determinants of domestic violence in rural Bangladesh demograh,140,269
- Mc Donnel, M.O (2003) Gender inequality in Nigeria, Ibadan Spectrum books Ltd.
- Mc Gibbon A, Cipper L, Kelly L (1989) What support? Hummersmith and Fulham Council Community Police Committee Domestic Violence London Polytechnic of North London.
- Mirrlees-Black, C (1999) Domestic Violence: Finding from a New British Crime Survey- self completion questionnaire, London: Home office.
- Mirseviic Z and Hughes, D M (1990-1993) Violence Against Women in Belgrade Serbia; SOS Hotline

- Obeng, S .K (2008) The current state of Domestic Violence among Women and children in Ghana. A case study of La-community SAMVENT's Research and Consultancy Unit
- Obi SN and Ozunba C (2007) Factors associated with domestic violence in South-East Nigerian Journal of obstetrics and Gynaecology. 127[1] 75-78
- Olurounbi Ruth [2012] Premium Times October 29
- Oyeniran KA and Isugo-Abanihe's [2005] "Perception of Nigerian women on domestic violence; evidence from 2003 Nigeria demographic survey" African Journal of Reproductive Health. 9; 38-53
- P.M. News Nigeria November 2012
- Project Alert (2001); Annual Report of Attack on women in Nigeria
- Project Alert (2004) No safe Haven Annual Report of Attacks on women in Nigeria's (2005)
- Rand M. R. (1997) Violence-Related Injuries. Treated in hospital emergency departments Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report Washington DC. US Department of Justice.
- Shija, MT (2004) Domestic Violence and Its Impacts on Women's Rights paper presented at a consultative Forum of stakeholders to discuss the Domestic Violence. Draft Bill in Benue State, Nigeria.
- Stanko E Crisp D, Hale, C. Lucraft H (1997) Counting the Costs: Estimating The Impact of Domestic Violence in the London Borough of Hackney Safer cities
- UNICEF (2001) children and Women Rights in Nigeria: Woke us call situation Assessment and Analysis Edited by Hodge Abuja. National Population Commission and UNICEF.
- United 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW]
- United Nation Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (UNCS DHA) (1993) Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual, New York United Nations.
- Wha-Soon BL (1994) A study on the prevention of an Counter measures Against Domestic Violence Women Studies Forum, 10, 148-71.
- WHO (2013) Responding to intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Against Women WHO Clinical And Policy Guidelines
- WHO [2005] "Addressing Violence Against Women and Achieving Millenium Development Goals. WHO/FCH/CWH/05/[Who.int/gender/en