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## GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

*Students in higher institutions of learning including those with disabilities continue to experience multidimensional forms of violence and harassment. Such violence includes physical, sexual, psychological harm and injury which are perpetrated on both female and male students by their teachers, care-givers, lecturers, fellow students and community members. Unfortunately, some schools turn deaf ears to the students' (victims) complaints and many students do not even complain because of fear of reprisal from their teachers or lecturers, and also because they believe that nothing will be done to the perpetrators/ offenders. This paper therefore, examined gender based violence experienced by students in the university campuses and the health and psychological consequences. Recommendations were also made. The study made use of excerpts from Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants of the universities to support the theoretical postulations in this study.*

### KEY WORDS:

Gender and gender roles, violence, gender based violence.

### INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is a serious problem especially in developing countries. It is a regular occurrence at all levels of Nigeria's educational system including the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education and other spheres of life (Ezumah, 2004). This violence applies to both female and male students in the school system, disability notwithstanding. However, females including those with disabilities are more vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence which takes place in the context of gender inequality, specific cultural beliefs and attitudes of people about gender roles especially those concerning male and female sexuality. It also manifests itself in a pattern of economic inequality and in some cases, significant political unrest and violent conflict. This context is critical for a fuller understanding of the health and psychological consequences of gender-based violence in schools. Studies show that gender-based violence is perpetrated on female and male students by their male peers, teachers and few females in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Outside the school, females and males can fall prey to 'sugar daddies and sugar mummies' who can provide favour and financial assistance such as school fees. Research indicated that gender-based violence adversely affect the victim's (female and male) health and psychological wellbeing Adamu (2004). The victims may develop bad feeling about themselves, contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, and have unwanted pregnancies. In most cases, many victims do not even complain because of fear of reprisal, shame and stigmatization in society. In so many schools, gender-based violence goes unchecked as a result of indifference from school administrators and the community at large.

Most of the studies conducted have focused on female gender-based violence alone however, little or no work has been done to systematically document and review the prevalence and consequences of

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gender-based violence on health and psychological state of the victims (female and male students) in Nigerian Universities. Based on this gap, the questions are: what are the gender based violence experienced by students in the university campuses and what are the health and educational consequences of the gender-based violence to the female and male victims? These questions underlie the purpose of the study.

### **GENDER AND GENDER ROLES**

Gender according to Pollard and Morgan (2002) refers to the socially constructed expectation for male and female behaviour which prescribe a division of labour and responsibilities between males and females which grant different rights and obligation to them.

In other words, gender is a socio- cultural construct which describes behaviours, roles, ideologies, attributes, relationship, obligations, status, expectation and the entire belief of what is

ascribed to females and males by culture based forces on sex or biological make up. Gender role is also the outward expression and demonstration of gender identity, through behaviours, attire, and culturally determined characteristics of femininity and masculinity (Kelly, 2004). Gender roles are integral part of any society that reflect the impressions, beliefs, attitudes and values of the population toward males and females. These gender stereotypes often affect individual behaviours and relationships (Santrock, 2005). These gender roles are set of expectations that prescribe how females or males should think, behave, feel and talk. For instance, should males be more assertive than females and should females be more gentle, sensitive and friendly than males to others' feelings? Nevertheless, males are globally believed to be dominant, independent, aggressive, enduring and achievement- oriented, while females are widely believed

to be dependent, affiliative, less esteemed, gentle, more friendly and helpful in times of distress (Santrock, 2005).

Gender roles and gender stereotypes give rise to prejudice, segregation and discrimination of individuals or one of the sexes in society particularly females which in turn gives rise to violence. Some males are affected, but females suffer all forms of discrimination or violence more (Kelly, 2004). Prejudice against females and some males is an act of violence which is embedded in social, cultural, educational, political, economic, religious, environmental structures and attitudes that marginalized females and some males; and these attitudes subject them to subordinate positions and at times tend to exclude females from many human endeavours and spheres of life (Kelly, 2004).

### **VIOLENCE**

Violence is usually associated with the use of threatening force that causes injury, which may be physical, emotional, psychological or mental. Violence is caused by a person (or people) against others and this results in pain, injury, stigmatization, humiliation and/or degradation (Baobab legal Literacy, 2000). Violence is also seen as an act of discrimination, even when the principle of non-discrimination and equality before the law is a basic provision of every human rights treaty. These treaties explicitly underline the fact that male and females' rights should be upheld to the same extent (Amnesty International, 2004). Dawn Ontario Disabled Women's network (n.d) also view violence as physical, psychological, sexual maltreatment, abuse or neglect of persons with disabilities. Females and males in Nigeria including those with disabilities and students in particular suffer so many forms of violence in spite of the fact that violence has been identified as a particularly grave human rights violation.

### **GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

Gender-based violence according to UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993:217) encompasses, but not limited to, the following: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, within the general community, or condoned by the state. It includes battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; rape, sexual abuse, and harassment at work, in educational institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Gender-based violence has also been seen as a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits females' ability to enjoy rights and freedom on a basis of equality with males (Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW, 2000). United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) noted that for an act to be considered as violent, and

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gender-based, there are some elements to be examined which include: cause or motive, circumstances or context, the act itself, the form a violation takes, For example, overtly sexual act, forced nudity, mutilation of sexual parts of the body. In the context of this study, gender-based violence refers to different kinds of actions or threats inflicted on females and males disabilities which may cause physical, sexual or psychological damage, injury, harm and suffering to the victims in the school, workplace or in the communities. This violence is inflicted on the individual on the basis of inferiority in both sexes.

There have been increasing reports of gender-based violence in educational settings from around the world and research has also shown that gender-based violence is particularly critical in developing countries where economic imbalances are extreme, literacy rates are low, basic universal education a goal rather than a reality and the HIV/AIDS pandemic often devastating with negative impacts on education and health of the victims (Wellesley

Centers for Research on Women, 2001). Research has also shown that in institutions, females with disabilities are more vulnerable to gender based violence. They tend to be more abused than their non-disabled female peers (Sobsey, 1988).

Various forms of gender based violence exist in Nigerian universities. Experience has shown that cult members in some Nigerian Universities resort to violence against their fellow males and also rape female students in order to intimidate the university community. Similarly, UNICEF (2001) noted that the students in secondary and post-secondary institutions in Nigeria experience gender-based violence such as rape, sexual harassment, verbal abuse and other types of sexual advances. The prevalence of gender-based violence in Nigerian Universities is also reported in the newspaper publications (Olurode and Oyefara, 2008).

Various forms of gender-based violence that constitute integral parts of many institutional cultures in the university campuses include:

Sexual assault, sexual abuse, rape, fondling, groping;  
Consistent beating/bullying and /or threats of sexual attacks;  
Creation of sexually hostile and intimidating environments;  
Demanding sex in exchange for job opportunities, promotions, and resources;  
Insistent sexualized talk, speculations about someone's sexual behaviour, talking about young girls as potential wives, rumours, gestures, blaming without reason, neglect, verbal abuse, asking about sexual practice or offering sexual 'confidence',  
Denial of access to jobs, opportunities, grades or resources if sex is refused;  
Sexualized gestures-palm scratching, bottom patting, touching of breast etc.  
The organization of sexual workers on campus, and the coerced use of students as sex workers off campus;

Gang rape, gang-type sexual assault, statutory rape, acquaintance rape or humiliation during initiation /orientation processes (Bennet, 2002b:25) and Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities (pornographic website and e-mail in particular) to send sexually explicit or sexually abusive comments or images to people without their consent (Penal Code, 2004).

Recent studies conducted in six universities in Nigeria indicate that these gender-based violence which are pervasive in these institutions of higher learning have adverse effect on the victims' general well being (Adamu, 2004 and Ezumah, 2004).

## HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence causes a lot of negative reactions that can disrupt the physical, sexual, social and psychological health of the victim. The typical reaction to forced sex sometimes called rape trauma syndrome often occurs in two phases. The first (acute or disruptive) phase is characterized by posttraumatic stress disorder such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and social adjustment problems (Morgan and Grillon, 1999). The second (recovery) phase may last for many months and may need a long-term reorganization to regain a sense of personal security and control over one's environment. Relationship with anybody or family members may be seriously disrupted and need to be resolved over a period of time; and the victim is reluctant to participate in usual shared sexual activities. Some victims feel very angry and they need to express this outwardly rather than allow it to turn into inner guilt, depression, or self-hatred (Berlo and Ensink, 2001; Stalker and Fry, 1999).

Gender-violence also causes physical damage, death, permanent disabilities, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, forced pregnancy and persistent gynecological problems for both female and male victims (Herman, 1992). The consequences of gender-based violence according to Human Rights



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Watch (2001) include ridicule by classmates, emotional or behavioural disorder and risk to health. It has been noted that gender-based violence is a threat to the victims ability in the performance of his/her job and that it creates unsafe environment that does not enhance equal opportunity that facilitates effective intellectual pursuits. (Paludi, Michele, Bariskman, and Richard 1995). The other effects of gender-based violence according to Appaiah and Cusack (1999:1) include "guilt, shame, self-blame, feeling of powerlessness, anger and fear'. This undoubtedly infringes on human rights of other people and totally undermines the notions of gender equity and democracy in the institutions of higher learning.

### METHODS

This study employed the use of focus group discussion (FGD) participants (students) in the universities to support the theoretical explanations of the literature. The population of the study comprised all final year female and male undergraduate students of the four federal universities in South East of Nigeria. The sample of the study was 128 participants. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two out of four federal universities in South East zone and two faculties were selected from each of the two universities. Simple random sampling was also used to select two departments from each of the two faculties to make a total of eight departments. Finally, purposive sampling technique was used to draw 16 final year female and male students from the eight departments in the two universities selected, making a total of 128 students as participants. The FGD had five questions which were used to elicit information from the students. The face validity of the instruments was done by giving the copies of the instruments to three experts in Sociology of Education, Psychology of Education and Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The FGDs were tape recorded and the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim after each discussion. Adequate interpretations of the participants' statements were ensured. The transcripts were studied and statements that had contextual importance or connotations were extracted and used as excerpts.

#### Results of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) of the Participants in Federal Universities

Types and meaning of gender-based violence experienced on campus.

Majority of the responses from the FGD participants (males and females) define gender based violence as harmful act or behaviour against females and males which can cause injury or damage to the person. The violence is usually against females. Gender-based violence comes in the form of sexual violence or sexual abuse, sexual harassment, beating and abuse of power. The definition of gender-based violence is buttressed in the following excerpts from the FGD respondents.

"Gender is all about male and female, and gender-based violence means what you don't like coming to you. For instance gender-based violence means harmful practices against females such as circumcision which has disadvantages with no advantages. Secondly rape which is the popular one on campus, sexual harassment between male lecturers and female students and abuse of power by Man O' war groups on campus, that is injustice meted against their fellow students" (FGD Female-Federal University).

"Gender-based violence is an illicit character found among males and females in our society which is caused by sexual immorality and moral decadence in our society. For example rape, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and abortion in the higher institutions and society at large. It can be caused by girls because sometimes they dress in a seductive and very attractive ways to entice men" (FGD male federal university).

In other words the respondents indicated that students experience sexual violence such as rape, beating, pouring of feces, females harassing males by their indecent dressing and snatching of valuables such as handset as the students move from one hostel to another and other campus facilities or other extracurricular activities.

The following excerpt from male FGD respondent illustrates that the quest for money and lack of self control over one's sexual urge by the lecturers led to the dismissal of two randy lecturers in one of the federal university

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...two lecturers in one department in their usual way collect cash in exchange for marks for male students or paying in cash or kind for female students or even both as case may be depending on the physiognomy of the girl in question. If the girl is very beautiful she pays in kind, if ugly, she pays in cash, and if the girl is beautiful and come from a rich family she must be forced to pay in both cash and kind. The lecturers were also involved in admission racketeering in which they made the students to pay N50, 000 in a special account number in one of the new bank but the one that exposed their evil deed was about a

first year student who was to take part in the last Post University Matriculation Examination screening test. The girl approached one of the lecturers for assistance and he told her that she was exempted from the payment of N50, 000, but she will go and sleep with him in hotel to satisfy his sexual gratification. So she

pleaded but he refused, the girl went and told his brother who reported the case to the Vice chancellor (V.C) who set the lecturer up by telling the girls to accept and book a hotel. Even though the security men did not catch the lecturer because he jumped through the window, his shoes, trousers, car and hand set were there in the hotel room. So the security men called the Area Command Police and all the things were seized by the police. The other lecturer was also making mess of female students, extorting money from them and having forced sex with those he likes. Thank God because their sins found them out as even questionnaire was shared to the students in that department to write the names of those lecturers that indulge in the act and 90% of the students wrote their names. The V.C took a good measure on them by sacking them. I narrated this because I am in that department and I was a victim and many male and female students have really suffered in their hands (male FGD federal university).

...actually the major cause is cultism and alcoholism. If you now come to female folk, their mode of dressing is in a very bad alarming rate and does not help the matter and too bad of what people think. You know, if someone is in the influence of alcohol and happen to come across a girl dressing naked or near naked, that person is not walking with his sense and may be tempted to molest or harm the girl (female FGD )

#### Health Consequences of Gender-Based Violence to the Victims

The FGD respondents indicated the followings as the health consequences of gender-\_based violence:

- Unwanted pregnancy
- Contraction of HIV/AIDs
- Contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Abortion
- Death depending on the gravity of harm /violence
- Injuries from beating
- Psychological and emotional trauma
- Development of phobia or hatred for opposite sex
- Depression and frustration
- Stigmatization
- Tendency of becoming a rapist.

The adverse effect of gender-based violence on victims is corroborated in this quote:

“...not only that they contract so many diseases like the rampant one called HIV/AIDs, staphylococcus, itching etc, they sometimes have fractures after forcing them with what I cannot even quantified with pressure different boys will apply to them. You find them in most cases being fractured or wounded and even bleed to death.

Mostly the person's worth decreases. In fact the rating of the person decreases from hundred percent to zero because the victim feels that everybody knew about it. The person feels depressed because something has happened to her and it makes her unstable as long as he/she lives.

Truly sexual abuse or immorality does not only affect the body of the victim but can also cause spiritual damages” (FGD male).

#### CONCLUSION

The negative health and psychological effects of gender based violence in Nigerian universities require that all hands should be on deck to address the problem. To critically curb gender based violence in schools, university administration and education stakeholders should effectively implement the policies and laws against gender based violence on the perpetrators irrespective of the person's sex, position or rank, whether students or staff, able or disabled individual

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:**

Schools need to develop a clear strategy that will tackle gender inequalities in schools; that is, a whole approach that allows teachers, students and administrative staff to work together on common goals for making school safe.

Schools need to promote a more supportive culture by facilitating and enforcing the reporting of gender based violence, providing effective counseling, encouraging constructive and equal relationship between students via positive role-modeling and explicit curricula and teaching/learning materials (i.e., life skills-based sexuality education programs with a gender and human rights perspective).

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