

## **THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A WAKE-UP CALL FOR NIGERIA**

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### **Article Info**

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### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence is a persistent and urgent issue in Nigeria, which has been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic era. The rise of violence against women in Nigeria has created negative impacts on the development of the country, particularly for its female population. Despite being a global phenomenon, violence against women has a particularly severe impact on Nigeria, with cases of discrimination and abuse being recorded in various areas of society. This article highlights the implications of this issue on Nigeria's development, particularly in terms of increased female illiteracy, criminality, and the denial of fundamental human rights.

### **Introduction:**

Violence against women is a long-standing issue in Nigeria, and its increase during the Covid-19 pandemic era has created severe challenges for the country. Nigeria has witnessed several cases of violence perpetrated against women by their male partners, which has created negative impacts on the development of the country. The ramifications of this issue on Nigeria's women are significant and far-reaching, ranging from increased female illiteracy to the denial of fundamental human rights.

This article highlights the implications of gender-based violence on the development of Nigeria, focusing particularly on its implications for women. It examines the negative impacts of violence against women on Nigerian society, including discrimination and abuse in various areas of society, such as workplaces, medical care facilities, and schools.

The pandemic's prolonged stay-at-home order likely led to increased violence against women, with some men using the opportunity to abuse, rape, or kill their wives and other female family members. This rise in violence has created a significant challenge for Nigeria's development, particularly in terms of increased female illiteracy and criminality.

Despite being a global phenomenon, the issue of violence against women has a particularly severe impact on Nigeria, with cases of discrimination and abuse being recorded in various areas of society. The article calls for a change in attitude towards women, protecting their rights, promoting their welfare, and supporting them with adequate education and skills to become economically relevant citizens.

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In conclusion, the issue of gender-based violence in Nigeria has created significant challenges for its development, particularly for its female population. The article highlights the need for concerted efforts to protect women's rights, promote their welfare and provide them with access to education, employment, and other opportunities.

### **Gender-based Violence as Global Phenomenon**

Violence against the females is a global phenomenon, which took a catastrophic dimension since the Covid-19 era when all normal human activities were forced to adapt to some “new normals.” The intention was to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus, most especially as the virus needed an infected and available patient to spread around (Afolabi, 2020; Nkwocha, et al, 2021).

Globally, the culture of male dominance is seems prominent most especially among developing nations. Among such nations, the use of excessive patriarchal powers, suppression female voices, rights, feelings, and concerns are predominant. Using the tool of religion, cultures and societal opinions, the males suppress their female counterparts. Largely, the males perpetrate violence against the females in an attempt to subject them into submission to the powers of patriarchy and authoritarianism. During the Covid-19 pandemic period, there was hardly any nation in the world where there were no gory cases of rape, kidnapping of females, wife battering, physical assault, drug abuse, trafficking of female victims, denial of rights, ritual killings, child labour, and unlawful exposure to life-threatening bodily injuries against the females (Onuoha, 2010; Asishana, 2020; Adeoluwa, 2020).

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram terrorist group kidnapped countless numbers of victims, majority of who were females. The atrocious activities of this dangerous group led to the untimely death, maiming, and decapitation of victims under their captivity within and outside Nigeria. Through their nefarious transborder activities communities, most especially the northern areas of the country were internally displaced and exposed to life-threatening risks. Innocent residents were kidnapped for ransom, recklessly raped, killed in their farms, chased away from their homes and forced to abandon their properties. Sadly, “Boko Haram has unleashed violence on people through guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, assassinations and kidnappings.” Sadly too, between 2009 and 2014, the group conducted 1301 attacks, killed 10,794 persons, wounded 3575 others, and displaced millions of persons from their homes (Azom, & Okoli, 2016).

Elsewhere, similar incidents occurred too. Gory news of violence, marginalization, sexual abuse, and denial of the legitimate rights of females were observed. In some Islamic nations, the females are denied their legitimate rights to attain education. Rather, they are given out in early marriage and forced to marry older men. Among such nations, which include Afghanistan, for instance, female children are often sexually harassed, exploited, drugged and forcefully trafficked out of their own communities (Okeke, 1989; Ojo, & Ayesoro, 2014).

Similarly too, there are constant report of violence against females, rampant sexual abuse, forceful withdrawal of from schools, restriction of the movement and subjection the females to forced labour. These acts of violence have been reported in countries such as Afghanistan which is currently under the government of the Taliban, Pakistan, Chad, Niger, Cameroun, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Syria, among others, where terrorist groups such as Al-Qa’ida, Ansaru, Al-Shabaab, Ansar Al-Dine and ISIS (Islamic

State in Iraq and Syria) are in charge. Under the intoxication of adulterated religious doctrines and faith practices, perpetrators create enough reasons to remain violent in order to undermine the natural relevance of females. Consequently, these radicalized agents of mayhem exacerbate aggressive violence against the females in order to make them feel unwanted, rejected, powerless, and marginalized (Onuoha, 2016).

With these, it is remarkable that violence against the females is heinous, demeaning, and inexcusable. Affected victims are unfairly treated, marginalized, maltreated, molested, and unduly suppressed. These cannot be allowed

to go endlessly. It is appropriate that there should be a change of attitude towards the females who deserve our protection, respect, and genuine appreciation as irreplaceable partners in the development of our world.

### **Impact on Nigeria's Development**

This segment shall be harmonized as follows:

#### **Increased Female Illiteracy**

Withdrawn from school and denied access to education amount to severe marginalization against the females in Nigeria. Usually, these deplorable attitudes against the females by their families and communities impede their chances of attaining quality education in the country's educational establishments. Kept out of schools, disallowed from enrolling into schools like their male counterparts, pushes the illiteracy levels among the females higher. As illiterates, they lack access to lucrative skills, unable to read and write and incapable of securing lucrative employment opportunities. These negatively impact their chances of living fulfilled and self-reliant lives.

Regrettably, latest statistics claim that 38% of illiterates in Nigeria are girls. This development affects their chances of emerging strongly as economic giants. Under such despicable conditions, they become un-empowered, disadvantaged, and disenfranchised from contributing effectively to national development. Based on these stereotypes, Nigeria's figures of female unemployment indexes climb higher by the day (Okeke, 1989; UNICEF, 1992; Onuoha, 2010; Iwunna, Dimonye, Okoro, & Njoku, 2020; Nigeria Television Authority, 2021).

#### **Premature Deaths of Females**

The pains and injuries suffered by females as a consequence of male-orchestrated violence often resulted to untimely and unfortunate deaths of victims. Owing to the gravity of such injuries, female victims suffer premature deaths. Countless female victims have been maimed and permanently handicapped. Owing to these unjustifiable atrocities affected female victims suffered permanent mental injuries, virginal perforations and severe damage to their private parts. For instance, incidents of gang rape were reported in some communities recently. The physical assault on female persons by their husbands, brothers, uncles, and cousins and the undue subjection of female persons to some inhuman conditions on the deaths of their spouses speak volumes (Okeke, 1989; Asishana, 2020; Iwunna, Dimonye, Okoro, & Njoku, 2020).

These explain the deep pains and psychological traumas female victims of gender-based violence pass through in life. The fact remains that there are no justifiable reasons for the perpetration of violent acts. No one can imagine the amount of pains suffered by a little baby who is wickedly raped by an adult male. What of the excruciating virginal injuries suffered by a female whose sensitive organs is forcefully perforated with some sharp objects by faceless rapists? The truth is that rape is an unimaginable crime. Rapists are criminals whose activities send several women to their early graves. They deserve full punishment under the laws of the land (Okeke, 1989; UNICEF, 1992).

#### **Lack of Access to Skills**

Generally, violence against the females militates against their chances of acquiring skills. Unduly subdued and denied access to basic education, their chances of acquiring lucrative skills get reduced. Faced with such despicable situations, chances of earning good incomes elude them and often into lives of economic dependence on the generosity of relatives for survival. At that, ability to enjoy a healthy and independent life becomes illusive. Ability to navigate the challenges of life becomes highly herculean. With no skills at hand, affected female victims eventually succumb to the pressures of becoming an economic nuisance to the family, and a heavy burden to the family and community. In such a miserable situation affected female victims suffer severe injustice in the hands of their family and relations. As a caution however, the UNICEF (1992) strongly advises that "educating girls is

one of the wisest investments for a society.” Among others, it empowers them with skills and improves their economic relevance in the community.

### **Forced Enslavement and Trafficking**

Violence against the females is also replicated in the forms of forced enslavement and trafficking of victims against their will. Forced to work in slave labour camps, operate as sex workers, or forcefully trafficked amount to horrible injustice and violence. They are condemnable acts of denial of rights. Such atrocities demean the dignity of the females, undermine their huge potentials as pillars of community development, and dampen their abilities to influence national development. Trafficked out of the country and forced to work under some inhuman conditions, their chances of making routine remittances to Nigeria are lost. Same time, contributing to the infrastructural development of their local communities become unrealistic (Irobi, 2015).

The indication is that their traffickers syphon and withhold their earnings permanently, deny them of their legitimate rights to work with dignity, and consequently make life unbearable for them. Thus, the miserable conditions Nigerian girls who are victims of trafficking syndicates endure in foreign lands in the present times have become issues of great concern to the Nigerian government in her efforts to eliminate human trafficking among Nigerians, some of who have been convicted of this offence in some overseas nations (Thompson, 2012).

### **Increased Criminality among Females**

Increased criminality among the female populations of Nigeria constitutes another major constraint created as a consequence of violence against the females. Consequent upon being subjected to the harsh realities of male-orchestrated violence in the hands of persons who are supposed to offer them protection, solace, comfort, and security, the females feel betrayed, let down, abandoned, and feel unwanted. Owing to their inaccessibility to brighter opportunities of acquiring lucrative skills, they feel rejected and unrecognized.

In an attempt to escape hunger, unemployment and poverty and be able to take care of their basic needs, affected females engage in criminal activities, such as prostitution, human trafficking and stealing. Others engage in drug abuse, kidnapping for ransom, cultism and other related crimes. Some operate illegal “baby factories” where young pregnant girls are impregnated and cared for, after which the babies are harvested and sold to waiting buyers at some huge prices. Because of the pains of the violence meted out to them, affected female victims easily enrol themselves into criminal gangs with the offer of cash, gifts, and other incentives which their families, communities and government never provided. It is important then that the government wakes up to her responsibilities of providing useful welfare packages, lucrative skills opportunities and training programmes for unemployed Nigerians in order to pull them away from the life of criminality and violence (Okeke, 1989; Onuoha, 2010).

### **Denial of Fundamental Human Rights**

Violence against the females denies them of their legitimate rights. Whenever any female in this country is debarred from enjoying school education as approved by Nigeria’s Constitution, her fundamental human rights are violated. Rights as a citizen have been denied. Similarly, whenever a female person is dangerously maltreated and subjected to inhuman conditions, such an activity amounts to an infringement of fundamental human rights. Thus, whenever a female suffers premature marriage, recklessly abused, raped, trafficked without her consent, forced into prostitution, or enslaved under any guises, cases of human rights infringement are obvious. Thus, those gender blind traditional practices which ignore the feelings of the females, trample on their rights to healthy life, and subject them to the excessive powers of the males amount to human rights infringements. These include female virginal mutilations, harsh widowhood rites, denial of property rights, as well as the culture of male-preference perpetrated in some families (Nzeadibe, 2015; Aikipitanyi, Luqman, Oliha, & Adesiyan, 2019).

## Summary

This paper has attempted to underpin the fact that there were severe incidents of violence against the females in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic era. Perpetrated along gender lines, the violent activities attempted to undermine the dignity and relevance of Nigeria's female. Such dangerous activities caused severe psychological, physical, and mental injuries and even resulted to death in some cases. Violence against any human person is a huge crime against humanity, and punishable under the law. Therefore, any acts of gender-based violence against Nigeria's *female populations anywhere in the country should be investigated thoroughly, while* perpetrators should be held accountable. Thus, all forms of violence against women and girls should be discouraged with impunity.

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