

## Violence Against Women and its Implication for Development: A case study of women in Kogi State



Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko

The Department of Political Science Federal University Lafia

Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Femi Tinuola

The Department of Sociology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko,

Ondo State, Nigeria

### Abstract

Violence against women (VAW) is a global phenomenon, a social problem and a critical aspect of the women's question which relates to a broad spectrum of issues affecting the female gender vis-à-vis their male counterparts. This paper used Socio-economic and Feminist Theories to examine various forms of discrimination against women; incidences of various forms of discrimination against women; various stages of discrimination against women; and the effects of VAW and its implications on development. The paper used both primary and secondary data. Through a survey, 350 women were sampled in five Local Government Areas of Kogi State. The paper demonstrated that VAW is as old as mankind and that women are the major victims of violence all over the world. Women suffer from different forms of gender-based violence which affect their health, psychological and socio-economic well-being. Women suffer trafficking, abductions, widowhood practices, rape, murder and socio-economic deprivations. Thus, the paper recommends that women should be sensitized on the dangers of GBV and encouraged to report acts of abuse irrespective of who perpetrates them; and policy-makers, governments, Non-Governmental Organizations, women organizations as well as members of the academia should be committed to fighting against VAW towards stamping out this dastardly act.

**Keywords:** Women, Violence Against Women, Development, Kogi State, Nigeria, Socio-cultural Theory, Feminist Theory

### Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of every society. It is a global concern as women all over the world are violated daily. Until recently, VAW was often limited to domestic violence such as violations that take place in the home by an intimate partner, for instance, wife battery. The scope of violence has now widened to include rape by a partner or non-partner, verbal abuse, marginalization

in the political arena, denial or deprivation of fundamental human rights and access to socio-economic privileges, dehumanizing traditional practices such as widowhood practices, female genital mutilation and any form of aggression that causes physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to or limits the liberty of a woman or the female. While in the developed world, the incidence of violence against is often reported and well documented, in developing countries in developing countries, it is under-reported and as a result, statistics are not readily of the culture of silence and the stigma that goes with it. A woman that is raped for instance may not want to voice it out because of the fear and feeling that she may become an object of ridicule. In addition, sometimes when such issues are reported and there is no justice as is usually the case, there may be a recourse to silence by the victims and others who may decide to take their fate into their own hands. Violence concern and poses an obstacle to development (Abama & Kwaja, 2009; Wilson Centre, 2011).

In Kogi State which is the focus of this study, acts of violation against women as in many parts of the country are diverse ranging from physical, social, and psychological to sexual violence. In addition, violence affects women from all walks of life and ages in line with UNDP's (1994) assertion that: "In no society are women secure or treated equally with men. Personal insecurity shadows them from cradle to grave... and from childhood through adulthood they are abused because of their gender." While some women's voices were heard through this research, there are millions of women whose voices are still unheard as they continue to suffer the dehumanizing violence inflicted on them by family, friends, foes and the community.

This paper examines the issue of VAW and its implication for development. Divided into eight sections, the paper begins with an introduction followed by a definition of the concept and history of 'Violence against Women'. Next is the theory which seeks to explain the underlying causes of VAW followed by the research objectives, methods and discussion of the results. Finally, a conclusion is drawn and recommendations made.

## **Conceptualizing Violence Against Women**

VAW refers to harm committed against women or suffering inflicted on women by virtue of their gender. Such violence is sometimes sanctioned by the state, the community and institutions of the state. There are four categories of gender-based violence namely; physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and socio-economic violence. Physical violence includes such acts as battery, slapping, kicking, punching, choking, burning, female genital mutilation etc (Graham-Harrison, 2014).

In the case of psychological violence, it could be verbal such as insults, degrading remarks, name-calling, isolation from friends or family members or any act aimed at demeaning a woman. Psychological violence often results in mental torture. Sexual violence on

the other hand involves an intimate partner or a non-partner forcefully having sex with a woman and includes rape, incest, child molestation, prostitution, pornography and child marriage (Willis & Levy, 2016; Canadian Women's Foundation, 2016). Socio-economic violence on its part refers to all acts against women that lead to deprivation or access to socio-economic privileges such as denial of access to employment, and marginalization of women in the political process among others. VAW takes place at the individual, family, community or state level. At the individual level, it includes rape and sexual harassment by a neighbor or a family friend, and date-killing by an aggrieved and jilted boyfriend.

At the family level, it could be domestic violence such as battering, rape, verbal abuse and murder by an intimate partner. At the community level, such practices as widowhood practices or rites which involve a woman drinking the water from the washing of her husband's corpse, sleeping with the dead husband's corpse, female genital mutilation, honor killing and gang rape as is common in India, child marriage, bride burning are cases in point while state-perpetrated violence includes, disenfranchisement of women, ban on female drivers, forced abortion, war rape etc. VAW constitutes a violation of women's rights and fundamental freedoms (Gender Across Borders, 2011; Shears, 2014; UN-OHCHR, 2016; Queen, 2016; WomanKind.org, 2016).

The rights of most women are violated at one point or the other in their lifetime. While for some, it may be at a particular stage in life, for others it may be at more than one stage. According to the WHO (2016), there are five stages at which VAW occurs, namely pre-birth, infancy, girlhood, adolescence adulthood and elderly. VAW has become one of history's greatest challenges caused by a number of factors ranging from armed conflict to culture (Wilson Centre, 2011; Nielson, 2012). While Nigeria is a party to a number of international, regional and national instruments that provide specifically for the protection of women's rights and gender equality, the reality on the ground in Nigeria shows that this is more of rhetoric as there is non-compliance with these instruments (Bob-Manuel, 2008; Umar, 2008).

## Historical Overview of Violence Against Women

VAW is as old as man; acts of VAW have been perpetrated for ages with many of these unreported or underreported. The first record of VAW is found in the bible where it was stated that: "... and when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child" (Revelation 12:13). There was also the case of Amon (2 Samuel 13:1-14) who committed incest when he raped his half-

sister, Tamar. In the same vein, a man's concubine was raped to death.

In another instance in John 8:3-11, it was recorded that a woman was brought before Jesus and the Pharisees requested that she be stoned to death because she was caught in adultery. Although it takes two to commit the act, only the woman was brought forth to be stoned to death. In places like Rome, Roman law gave men the right to flog their wives even to the point of death just like the English Common law that allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick. In the Northern states of Nigeria, the penal code gives men the right to 'correct' their wives. Other practices which have been on for decades such as disenfranchisement of women, the practice of purdah and the burning of witches etc, are all instances of VAW.

### **Theoretical Standpoint**

Socio-cultural and Feminist theories are adopted for this study. Socio-cultural theories focus on the socio-cultural orientations of society and how this affects the relationship between men and women. Socio-cultural theorists establish a link between socio-cultural belief systems and practices and VAW. The main arguments of the proponents are that vaw arises out of a specific type of cross-gender relations anchored on the dominant ideology which also defines the nature, character and even content of how men and women relate. This is buttressed by the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1994) which sees gender-based violence as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and constitutes one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

Feminism on the other hand focuses on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's interest while investigating the world of women in relation to their male counterparts. Feminist theorists recognize women's oppression, and examine what contributes to the maintenance of that oppression, commitment to ending unjust subordination and a futuristic vision of equality with men (Boundless.com, 2016). Like the social-cultural theorists, they believe that men have power and privileges over women because of gender stratification and the patriarchal nature of society which favors the oppression of women. According to them, not only are women unequal to men, they are subordinate to and even abused by men. Radical feminists for instance identify physical violence at the base of patriarchy.

### **Research objectives**

The main objective of this paper is to review various forms of discrimination against women from the theoretical and empirical data. The working objectives are to examine:

- I. From existing literature, various forms of discrimination against women;
- II. From empirical data, incidences of various forms of discrimination against women;
- III. The various stages of discrimination against women;
- IV. Effects of VAW and its implications on development.

## Research Method

This study relied on both primary and secondary data. For Primary data, 350 women were sampled randomly in Kogi State, North/central Nigeria. Five local government areas were selected using systematic random sampling. In each of the local council areas, 70 women were selected from two urban and two rural communities making a total of 350 women from 10 rural and 10 urban communities in the State. The instrument is a structured questionnaire which contains both open and closed-ended questions of VAW. The instrument underwent a pretest and reliability test showing a 0.93 level of significance. The instrument was administered by a group of field workers who had initial training in research and fieldwork. Secondary data involved the use of existing literature and documentary evidence on discrimination against women. Quantitative data were analyzed in simple percentages while qualitative data were analyzed in content and discussed simultaneously.

## Results

There was a 100% response rate to the questionnaires. A breakdown of the response is shown in Tables 1,2,3 and 4 below:

**Table 1**

### Incidence of Physical Violence

S/N	Forms of Physical Violence	Responses (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Battering: slapping, hitting, biting, kicking, punching,	66.0	34.0
2	Burning, stoning, flogging	45.0	55.0
3	Acid bathing	15.0	85.0
4	Female genital mutilation	95.0	5.00

**Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2014**

**Table 2****Incidence of Psychological Violence**

S/N	Forms of Physical Violence	Responses (%)	
		Yes	No
1	Verbal abuse	86.0	14.0
2	Widowhood practices	65.0	35.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2014

**Table 3****Incidence of Sexual Violence**

Responses	Percentage (%)
No	75.0
Yes	25.0
Total	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2014

**Table 4****Incidence of Socio-Economic Violence**

Responses	Percentage (%)
No	68.0
Yes	32.0
Total	100.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2014

**Discussion Of Results**

Findings obtained in both theoretical and empirical data indicate that women suffer from different forms of violence such as physical, psychological, sexual and socio-economic violence depending on social and environmental factors. Specific data are presented and discussed below. From the population surveyed, over 66% of the total respondents indicated that they had suffered one form of physical violence or the other in their lifetime such as battering, slapping, hitting, kicking, flogging, punching and female genital mutilation.

About 86% of the women surveyed had experienced psychological violence such as verbal abuse and widowhood practice while about 65% of the widows experienced discrimination. Furthermore, 75% had been sexually abused. The women were victims of rape, gang rape and incest. From the survey, 68% of the women surveyed had suffered from socio-economic violence such as denial of rights to work and participate in politics.

From the foregoing, psychological violence tops the list with 86%, followed by sexual and socio-economic violence with 75% and 68% respectively. Contrary to popular opinion, physical violence comes last with 66% of the women surveyed being victims. Some of these acts were perpetrated against the victims at different stages of their lives, from childhood to adulthood. In most of the cases mentioned above, the victims never reported the matter to the relevant authorities owing to the issue of ignorance, cultural beliefs and the culture of silence.

In traditional Nigerian society, women are often advised by their mothers never to report issues of battery by their spouses. Battery by a spouse is not seen as a crime while the issue of rape by an intimate partner is regarded as a taboo. In other words, a man can never rape his woman since she is his 'property'. Generally, it is believed that women with good upbringing would never report cases of sexual harassment because of the shame that goes with it. Women, therefore, have to live with the trauma. Women who have been victims of violence suffer physical as well as psychological effects of such violence. Some of the effects on them include injury, low self-esteem, ostracism, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional distress, suicide attempts, insomnia, mental torture, depression and in some cases death (Hutchins, & Shinha, 2015; Simpson,2016).

## Conclusion

Gender-based violence has become endemic in recent times and women all over the world continue to suffer from its effects. Women in Nigeria like their counterparts in many developing countries are subjected to various forms of violence from infancy to old age. Unlike in other countries, victims of gender-based violence in Nigeria often do not have the attention and publicity that this crime attracts because some acts of violence such as battery and rape by an intimate partner, widowhood practices, child marriage, female genital mutilation among others are not regarded as criminal acts as the society approves some of these acts.

Even among the victims themselves, violence against them is not a crime as society makes them believe that some of the acts they are subjected to are required by tradition and religion, for instance,

victims of FGM, widowhood practices and purdah. As a result of this even where there is provision for them to seek redress, they do not take advantage of this and this makes the work of difficult.

Furthermore, Nigerian society is slow in addressing the issue despite several laws such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) among others. To check the menace of gender-based violence in the country, the following are recommended:

1. In the first place, women should be sensitized to the dangers of gender-based violence and encouraged to report acts of abuse irrespective of who perpetrates them, their spouses and family members. Women's rights organizations and the media have a role to play in this regard.
2. There must also be education of women and the girl-child which is a key resource for empowerment. They must be educated on their rights and actions to take when such rights are violated.
3. Women must also be empowered economically by way of training and skills acquisition to give them a voice in society.
4. Women must be involved in decision making at all levels to ensure that they lend their voices against gender discrimination and violence. The practice of excluding women from decision making processes which is deeply rooted in tradition, culture and region that place different values on men and women should be discarded. Equal opportunity for men and women should be the order of the day. Equality between men and women are prerequisite for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security.
5. There must also be zero tolerance for gender-based violence. To this end, punitive measures must be put in place with the aim of bringing to justice the perpetrators of VAW. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission must ensure that the rights of women in the country are safeguarded.
6. Policy-makers, governments, Non-Governmental Organizations, women organizations as well as members of academia have a stake in the fight against VAW and must do all they can to see that this dastardly act is stamped out.

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