

# **Gender Based Violence against Women and Its Implication on the Girl Child Education in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines gender based violence against women and its implication against the girl child in Nigeria. The paper also discussed the prevalence of gender based violence against women and the girl child. In addition, the paper explains ways of alleviating this menace and finally, one of the recommendations preferred was that, effective grass roots campaign involving the use of various media such as radio, television and posters should be used to enlighten the general public about the educational implication of gender based violence on the girl child.

**Keywords:** Gender, Violence, Girl child, Women, Education.

## **Introduction**

Gender refers to all the characteristics, expected behaviour and roles of men and women which a particular society has determined and assigned to each sex. It is a term describing behaviours and attributes expected of an individual on the basis of being born either a male or a female. The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power threatened against oneself, another person, a group or country that either results or has a high likelihood of affecting lives or resulting to death. Gender based violence therefore covers those incidents in which one sex asserts power by using sexual or similar acts to achieve submissiveness and fear in another person and in the process commit an offence against the dignity or privacy of that person (Ndungu, 2004). Therefore, gender based violence against women is a term that broadly incorporates many behaviours that manifest as physical, sexual or psychological damage to women or girls, which is a violation of human right, The protest against violations of human rights is based on the United Nations Charter of 1945, which recognises the need to stop mistreating all citizens. In compliance with that standard, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly which Nigeria is a signatory to, described discrimination against women as any distinction, exclusion made on the basis of sex, which has an effect or for the purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition of right exercised by

women, irrespective of their mental status, on a basis of equality of men and women; of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economical, social, cultural, civil or any other field. The violations are not limited to physical but sexual and physiological violence occurring in the family and in the community. It includes battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowering related violence, mental rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices that are harmful to women. Violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, and most recently women trafficking are inclusive. Violence can occur during any phase of a woman's life such as in childhood, adolescent and even as an adult. In whatever stage a woman encounters violence, thus exposes her to suicide, depression and drug abuse.

### **Prevalence of Gender Based Violence Against Women in Nigeria**

Gender based violence against women in Nigeria occur in many areas but more of domestic (violence within the family). It usually happens to the woman or the girl child within the family. They include rape (more among family members), women being beaten up by their husbands, verbal abuse, incest, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage, denial of right to choose spouse, denial of the right to own a property, refusal to permit women to work or to control their own income, refusing the girl child to go to school, all forms of cruelty for example degrading a woman by treating her as if she were a child, refusing her any affection or sexual satisfaction. It also include restricting a woman's relationship with the wide community such as friends colleagues or relatives, seeing women as incompetent, worthless or inferior to men, girls trafficking with the intention of using them as commercial sex workers. Others are physical assaults imposed on widows indirectly regarded as widow's rites. According to WHO (2002), about one third of all the women in Nigeria had at one time or the other been a victim of violence in its divers form. In addition, a release by Jekayinka (2010) indicates that domestic violence, female genital mutilations and forced prostitution are still being practiced among Nigerians in an alarming rate. Worse still cultural practices and beliefs among tribes in Nigeria fuel the violence and relegate women to second class status. For instance, in some tribes in Nigeria, a woman has no right to inherit her husband's property. Widows are humiliated, confined and restricted in the same position as long as one year, all in the name of mourning her late husband. Most common among the violence practiced is child trafficking. Murzi, (2004) observed that over 60 percent of the children often trafficked from Africa to Europe for sex exploitation are Nigerians. The children are often deceived by syndicates who pretend to help secure jobs for them, but only to transport them to Europe and use them as prostitutes. All these acts of violence against women in Nigeria cut across cultures, traditions, class, and ethnic groups. Majority of women in Nigeria are not aware of human right violations. Even those that are aware are afraid of stigma, consequently tolerate violence, while they suffer in silence until the consequences starts manifesting in depression, low self esteem and attendant health problems.

### **Causes of Gender Based Violence Against Women in Nigeria**

Violence against women in Nigeria results from biological differentiation of sexes. This is because females are biologically and physiologically perceived as the weaker sex who requires

considerable protection by men. The relegation of women to the second class status dates back to several centuries ago. Early history showed that the human society has been a male dominated one. For instance, a society like the Arabians regards the birth of a daughter as a matter of shame and disgrace and treats them as such. While the birth of a son is welcomed with jubilation, and celebrations and are cradled on the bed clothed in robes and given jades scepter as toys. Likewise in Nigeria, the birth of male child excites members of the family than a female child. As the girl passes through the stages of development, she is bewildered with the peculiar violence of that stage, and as the girl child grows older the discrimination against her increases.

Another cause of gender based violence is culture. In Nigeria, there is the belief that boys are stronger than girls and so are trained to accept more strenuous tasks like hunting, shooting with bows and arrows, farming and fighting back enemies that are about to out-run their communities. While girls are stereotyped to perform simpler tasks like sweeping the rooms, scrubbing the walls and collecting firewood to cook for the family so that they can become good wives and mothers in future. In addition, women are excluded from rigorous and traditional activities like tree climbing (e.g. palm tree) or from engaging in traditional sports like wrestling, canoeing and horse-back riding which were exclusively made for men. What was reserved for women were lighter recreational activities requiring graceful movement, or they were only allowed to watch the men and cheer them up. This cultural unequal power led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement.

Financial insecurity according to Njenga (1999) is another cause of gender based violence. In his/her comment "if a man cannot establish his authority economically over his family members, he would tend to do so physically". A situation where a man is unable to meet the financial needs of his family members means he has failed in his responsibility, as it is well known no man would like to be seen as a failure. In other words total dependency on a man, by the family members leads to frustration and sometimes, expresses it through the use of violence.

Another cause of gender based violence against women is poverty. Ndungu (2004) opined that the reproductive and productive roles of women often place them at the bottom of the ladder. They are mostly found in low paid jobs, which rob them of power to participate in decision making, within the political, social-economic and cultural sphere of life. This situation results in the over burdening of women with family and domestic responsibilities while giving them no resources or political room to improve their standard of living. In some parts of Nigeria, it is known that the input of the girl child into the family income is so high that it becomes economically unwise to allow such a child to go to school. Examples of such inputs include generating income by hawking food items, helping with the household chores and looking after the younger ones or even working as house helps to wealthier families to ease the financial burden on their own families.

## **Concept of Education**

Education is simply defined by Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary as a process of training and instructing children and young people in schools and colleges which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. Education as it were, is part of culture, in that, it is a lifelong learning that enables a person at any age to understand the relationships between the environment and the circumstances he/she finds his/herself. The planned and systematic training giving in an institution of learning is formal education, while informal education is the type of education that is not planned, the training is haphazard and accidental. Whether formal or Informal, education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society. Education is one of the fundamental rights of the individual. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Dec, 1949 stipulated that:

- Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages;
- Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available;
- Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit;
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 1976)

## **The Girl Child Education**

The girl child is the biological female upsprings from birth to 18 years of age. Girl child education is the education given to female children between ages birth to 18 years; it covers early childhood (0-5years) primary (6-12 years) and secondary (12-18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of a guardian who is usually an adult or parents. In this period, the girl child builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on those she admires through observation, repetition and imitation. Through proper education, the girl child develops her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional characteristics necessary for her to properly fit into the society.

## **Realities about Education of the Girl Child in Nigeria**

Education is known to hold the key to the advancement of human society, .but this has remained a mirage to the girl child in Nigeria. It is a truism that girls have been disadvantaged in education with gender based violence and other teeming problems as obstacles that and are still endangering the right of the girl child to education. Often, her dreams, aspirations and expectation of life are often discordant with what reality has in stock for her, leading to frustrated ambition of hopes, disillusionment, depression and sometimes delinquency. The girl child stays at home to learn domestic activities while the male counterpart attended school.

Family as an important social component has not helped matters but has often militated against her fundamental rights. The girl child has desirable goals but end up victims of forced marriages, sources of exorbitant bride price, frustrated dreams and in some cases premature death. Some forms of violence also predispose the girl child to oppression, exploitation, slavery and dehumanization. The girl child in some cases end up being hawkers of food stuff to supplement family meager earnings. Statistics have shown that 63% of women are illiterate compared to 41% of men in the world and 10% of illiterate women in the world are from Nigeria. 18% of children between ages 15-19 years in Nigeria give birth to babies and 2 out of 3 who cannot read are women (UNICEF, 2010).

### **Implications of Gender Based Violence on Education of the Girl Child**

Violence against the girl child has serious barrier on her education in the following ways:

- 1. Access to Education:** Access is the opportunity provided for the girl child to be educated. Access deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. Violence such as child labor, forced marriage and using girls as house helps as identified by Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008), have prevented millions of girls from having access to education which is their fundamental human right. In addition, poverty and the level of education of mothers are some factors hindering females access to education. In line with that, over 70% of Nigerians live below poverty line (UNICEF, 2010). This has prevented many Nigerian parents, especially large families with limited resources from enrolling their female children in schools while their male counterparts are given preference. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to economic and religious beliefs.
- 2. Enrolment and Attendance:** Gender based violence is a problem that limits girl education, causes poor enrolment and attendants in primary and secondary schools. This is because girls continue to face many obstacles that impede their part to learning. Thus, it is generally believed among some Nigerians that enrolling girls for formal education is a waste of time and resources, as she would be married as sooner or later. To buttress this belief, cultural aspects like forced marriage, inheritance law, sexual harassment, unintended pregnancy and domestic responsibilities tend to conflicts with enrolment and attendance of girls in schools. Statistics has it that the enrolment percentages of the boy child are consistently higher than that of the girl child, and out of the number that enroll in primary schools in Nigeria, only 43% enter Secondary Schools (UNICEF,2003 ).
- 3. Mental Health:** Gender based violence thus has some serious impact on the mental health of the girl child which consequently affects her performance in school. WHO (2010) explained that abused girls are more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, It further pointed out that violence against the girl child affect their ability to learn or even the willingness to takes part in school activities. Also physical violence such as kicking, rape, slapping, intimidation, oppression sexual harassment, being laughed at, and unfair treatment weather at home or in school can all lead to children running way from school and home, subsequently, exposing them to serious danger.
- 4. Absenteeism:** Violence against the girl child has other serious implication to the girl child education such as it leads to absenteeism in school among pupils and students.

According to UNICEF (2010), 6% of female children were absent from school because of physical violence. In a further analysis, more girls (7%) than boys (2%) were absent from school due to domestic violence in Northern Nigeria in the year 2010. Absenteeism leads to dropout. Umarnah (2005) opined that the rate at which female dropout of primary and post primary institutions in Nigeria is alarming and ascribed violence as one of the major reasons. Amannachukwu (1978) reported that the rate of drop out in secondary schools is more among females than males due to forced marriage and unwanted pregnancies. Other notable reasons why females drop out of school are that, some parents feel that only their sons deserve to be fully educated, that their daughters need little or no education and so interrupt their daughters education before completing secondary school. Domestic violence will most likely result to poor nutrition and there are clear evidences that malnutrition adversely affect schooling. Gratham (2001) found out that better nourished girls were more attentive during classroom observation than their malnourished female counterparts. Furthermore in his findings, girls who had adequate nutritional status scored higher on the cognitive test than those girls with poor nutritional status. Nickel (2004) opined that malnutrition renders children restless and uninterested in learning. All these implied that the girl child education will be highly impaired with poor feeding. The importance of the girl child education cannot be overemphasized in any society. With the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the girl child in adult hood, contributes a lot to societal development. Also education affords her the opportunity to use family planning which results in few births of children she can easily carter for.

### **Need of Education to the Girl Child**

According to Jayinka, (2010), a woman's inability to read and write could make her to be prone to the misuse of medicine. Her ignorance of healthy living habits and measures to prevent illness also affect her welfare, her family and society in general. Education affords the girl child to know her right and become less vulnerable to exploitation. Over the years women in Nigeria have been discriminated against, exploited, violated and denied their right by the society; with education a woman can object to such practices.

Education increases female productivity in the informal sector and therefore enables her to contribute not only to her family income but also increase the natural GNP. It empowers women to participate in politics as voters and contestants, which thus give them opportunity to partake in vital decision, that affect their lives. Educate a man you educate an individual but educate a woman, you educate a nation Thus summarizes the essences of education of the girl child as the mother of tomorrow.

### **Conclusion**

Violence against women is an age long problem which has to be addressed. It is an obstacle to peace, progress and a threat to the objective of equality; they appear as traditions, customs and religious practices that lowers the status accorded to women. Their implications are likely to impair the girl child inability to meet with Education For All (EFA) in 2015 set out to achieve

by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS). For these reasons, it should be totally checked by all agencies concerned.

### **Recommendations**

In order to reverse the negative trend of gender based violence against women and improve on the education of the girl child in Nigeria, the following recommendations have been preferred:

1. Government and nongovernmental organizations should support and organize seminars to educate all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
2. Government should condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any tradition or religious considerations as set out in the declaration act on the elimination of violence against women.
3. Government should enact and and/or reinforce penal, civil, labor and administrative sanctions in legislations to punish and redress, any act of violence done to women and girls, whether in the home, workplace, community or society.
4. Government must ensure proper policy formulation and implementation strategies and be consistent in executing programmes aimed at eradicating any act of violence against women.
5. There must be an effective grass roots campaign involving the Non Government Organization (NGOS), Community Organizations, by using various media such as Radio, Television and posters to enlighten the public about violence against women and to report such cases to appropriate authorities.
6. The government should operate free and compulsory Basic Education for children, eradicate all forms of fees, and give free books and learning materials to children. When this is done then laws can be made to compel parents to send their children to school.

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