

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA: A POLICY VOICE FOR EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD

**Dr UDUAK IDOGHOR &
BARR. OLANREWAJU ALADEITAN**
University Of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State,
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Violence against women can be seen as a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 (30%) of women in their lifetime, WHO¹. The level of violence appears in varying proportions. There has been violence, from body mutilation to physical, verbal, or emotional abuse women have been subjected to, to inadequate legislative measures, traditional norms, and religious beliefs. Women are considered the weaker vessels due to their gender construct and this has often impeded the opportunities for advancement resulting in disregard and role stereotypes. Failure to address this issue will result in a significant cost to the future generation. Numerous studies show that survivors of violence against women and girls end up with endemic scars or become gross perpetrators themselves. The purpose of this research is to appraise violence against women and the education of the girl child in Nigeria on legislative policies as related to them. The findings obtained from this doctrinal research indicate that women's exposure to violence is influenced by geographical location, religion, level of education, and age, among others. This research will be significant to the men and women and the girl child, government policymakers, custodians of tradition, and religious adherents by way of recognizing the implications of certain practices within their domain. In conclusion, a policy voice is needed by way of an enforceable legal framework to stop violence against women in Nigeria and to educate the girl child on her rights as a human being. It is recommended that legal backing must be given to international treaties and policies that are against violations of women's rights and the girl child educated on these rights.

Keywords: violence, policy voice, education, girl child

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tales about violence against women in Nigeria cannot be farfetched or overemphasized as it is a daily experience in many homes, offices, neighborhoods and societies. The mass and social media is replete with stories of women who have been abused, harassed, and threatened, physically and emotionally by both their kind and the opposite gender. Abuse is recorded at home by way of spousal objectification, in various workplaces by way of sexual harassment and advancement denial due to gender construct, on the streets by way of catcalls, in market places by way of indecent verbal and physical assault, everywhere and every day. Notwithstanding, these facts sometimes the abuse comes from their fellow women. Some, especially the girl child, are forced into marriages where they are more or less treated like "slaves" who have to do the bidding of their "masters" (husbands).

There are women who face the worst kind of torture and degradation any woman could go through when they lose their husbands. Some are forced to drink the water used to bathe the husband's corpse. Some are thrown out on the streets with their children by their husband's relatives, leaving them to their fate. Aside from being abused, when they lose their husbands, women are victims of domestic violence and this ugly trend is getting worse every day. For example, in 2016, a staff of one of the new generation banks, Zenith Bank, was summoned before the Bode Thomas Magistrate's Court, Lagos State, Nigeria for the offense of breaking his wife's, legs with a metal rod, thereby causing her grievous bodily harm. If not for the timely intervention of her neighbors, the situation would have been worst. A chance encounter with two young ladies in their mid-thirties who instituted divorce or at least judicial separation proceedings against their husbands respectively shows they were both married with children. The two working-class ladies were reportedly, repeatedly, and consistently abused by their husbands to a point that they could not endure the torture anymore and therefore, the decision to sue for divorce. It is not in doubt that so many other Nigerian women are daily being violated and abused. Unfortunately, many of them are afraid to speak out because of public ridicule and shame. Some cannot walk out of their marriages for fear of where to go and how to survive. Some do not know who to approach for help as the religious institutions and peer groups or family members and relations are nonchalant. The general belief is that the creed of the marriage institution is sacred and should be held in high honor, in life or death.

Although the Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs are the statutory bodies to handle matters of this nature, recent developments have shown there are many challenges in resolving such matters. There have been situations where victims are referred to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their expert and prompt intervention.

Violence against women is endemic, as it is one of the unfortunate legacies of the African tradition. Though not peculiar to Africa, violence against womenfolk and the girl child is universal by varying degrees. The trend has been that women were treated like foot mats, properties, and second-class citizens. Again in some cases, as baby breeding machines. This can be gleaned from the comment of President Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR) Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria during an interview in Germany a few years ago, where he described his wife as being good or useful for the 'kitchen and the other room'. This comment generated public outcry and fury from both male and female genders for such an unguided statement from a person of his social and political status. This shows that violence against women is a norm and cuts across social strata and socio-cultural divides without restraint.

This paper will be looking at violence against women, the causes and effects of certain legislations against it, and suggestions for a more acceptable standard. It is important to state that discourse on violence against women can hardly be exhaustive but an adequate tone is created here for vibrant arguments towards a lasting and more acceptable standard. This will also add vigor to the ongoing debate on gender parity and agitation for the promotion and protection of women's equality thereby, hopefully, putting an appreciable end to violence against women and the like.

2.0 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

It is critically imperative at this juncture that we examine the global perspective of violence against women. The United Nations in its report titled Women, Business and the Law, 2016, defined domestic violence as:

Gender-specific violence is commonly directed against women, occurring in the family and in interpersonal relations. Interpersonal relationships can refer to partners who do not live together or are not married. The abuse can be physical, emotional or psychological, sexual, financial, or economic¹.

The report went further to define the concepts paraphrased as any intentional behavior that offends a woman bodily, her integrity, or health as Physical violence. Another is any conduct or behavior that causes emotional damage, reduces self-worth or self-esteem, or aims at the degrading or controlling a woman's actions, behavior, beliefs, and decisions by means of threat, embarrassment, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, constant surveillance or pursuit, insult, intimidation, blackmail, ridicule, exploitation or any other behavior that damages a woman's psychological health is emotional or psychological violence. Also, any conduct or behaviors that force a woman to witness, maintain or participate in unwanted sexual contact or behaviors by means of intimidation, threat, coercion or use of force, including sexual assault, marital rape, or forcing any type of sexual activity without consent is sexual violence. Unwanted sexual language, even implied, whether physical, verbal or suggestive can be categorized as sexual violence against women or girls.

Again any conduct or behavior involving the use or misuse of the partner's consent regarding their financial resources or assets, including the deprivation, retention or subtraction of money or property or by other means making or attempting to make a woman financially dependent by maintaining control over financial resources is financial or economic violence.

3.0 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN EUROPE

According to Helen Clark, 37th president of New Zealand from 1999-to 2008, opined that "No country will reach its full potential if its female citizens do not enjoy full equality."² She also referred to a study by Georgetown University's Institute for Women which ranked New Zealand 18th in terms of women's peace and security³. Also in her speech on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in November 2015, she decried the fact that 1 in 3 women had experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly by intimate partner⁴. In Denmark, Luxemburg and other parts of Europe girls are still in danger of genital mutilation⁵. This is classified by the United Nations to include procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to female genitals for non-medical reasons. This practice carries many health risks even as far-reaching as death. It also causes extreme physical and unimaginable psychological trauma. Intimate partner violence is most prevalent and reaches irreversible consequences. The United Nations has also adopted strategies to end every form of child

¹ UN, women, business and the law.com

² <www.latinamerica.undp.org > assessed 6th August 2021

³ < www.giwps.georgetown.edu.com > assessed 4th April 2021

⁴ www.bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com> assessed 4th April 2021

⁵ < www.endfgm.eu.fgm-in-europe> assessed 4th April 2021

marriage⁶. The Council of Europe Convention in May 2011 took up the lead role in order to raise awareness through groundbreaking standards and reform implementation to combat all forms of violence⁷.

Trafficking and exploitation of women and girls in Europe have reached a crescendo. The European Parliament, Council Presidency, and the Council Presidency jointly made a strong call for action to member states towards ratifying and fully implementing the Istanbul Convention on the total eradication of violence against women and girls¹. Facts and figure in UNWomen.org reveal that every 1 in 3 women has experienced more than one form of violence¹. Today in Europe shows that Turkey withdrew from the treaty sparking protests and rioting². Despite the withdrawal of turkey, 44 countries signed the treaty³. This milestone has enabled member countries to change their definition of rape to be more in line with the treaty which is consent-based. There was a growing call for reforms by ‘#me too’ movement as demands for protection against sexual abuse and harassment grew⁴. Hillary Margolis, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch noted how the treaty has helped enact laws that criminalize types of abuse not legally seen as crimes before. Such examples are stalking, child marriage and female genital mutilation, amongst others⁵. Finland introduced a 24/7 helpline for victims of domestic violence and increased shelters for such. The fatal stabbing of Ornella Pinto 12 times by her former partner in Naples fast-tracked Italy into enforcing policies that will stop violence against women⁶.

4.0 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN AFRICA

Africa, no doubt, holds the unenviable role of leading the pack in violence against women and girls. This is however supported by weak legislation, gender discrimination, bureaucratic bottlenecks and studs enforced by repugnant traditions and customs.

South Africa is known to have the highest rate of violent attacks against women in the world, Foster (1999) as recorded in the Integrated Regional Network (IRIN)⁸. In Egypt, a survey showed 80% of rural women said domestic violence is commonplace, JIWS (2004)⁹.

In Nigeria, a report by UN Human Rights has submitted that Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence is 17.4% while child marriage is 43.5%. Female genital mutilation/cutting is 18.4%¹⁰. Global Gender Gap Index Rank (2016) ranked 0.64 and by 2020 it barely changed to 0.63¹¹. The National Population Commission(NPC) places Nigerian women between the ages of 15-and 49 years as having almost all experienced intimate partner physical/or sexual violence¹².

5.0 SOME CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA

⁶ <www.un.com > assessed 4th April 20201

⁷ <www.europewatchdog.info>council.com > assessed 4th April 2021

⁸ <www.coe.int>web>istanbul-convention.com> assessed 5thApril 2021

⁹ <www.ochr.org> displaynews.com> assessed 5thApril 2021

¹⁰ <www.ec.europa.eu.com> assessed 5thApril 2021

¹¹ <www.bbc.com> assessed 5thApril 2021

¹² <www.hrw.org > assessed 7thApril 2021

A case of violence against women is not peculiar to Nigeria though it would be noteworthy to examine some cases in order to give credence to the need for severe penal measures to end such acts. Section 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) provides:

(1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:

- a) (a). Be subjected either expressly, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religion, or political opinions are not made subject;¹³

(2). No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his birth.

Therefore, sections 42 (1) and (2) of the 1999 Constitution forbids discrimination of any nature, manner, or character against Nigerian citizens male or female, young or old respectively. Inequality can be juxtaposed with violence against women in Nigeria because a situation where a male counterpart will be paid a higher wage than his female counterpart on the same work level, with the same educational or academic qualification, does not augur well, and will negatively impact the strides towards bridging the inequality gap. Cases abound where a woman despite being a lower wage earner than her spouse, was still forced to be the breadwinner in the family, while her husband is free without questioning to do whatever he wishes to do with his money, however, and whenever he so wishes, without query. At this juncture, it is important to take a brief look at the factors that lead to violence against women and the girl child in Nigeria namely:

1. Improper education: This is true because an ignorant or illiterate person will find it difficult to know his or her rights not to mention defend them. Male preference is a common feature of most patriarchal societies such as Nigeria and so the male child is commonly given preference for education over the female. It is believed that the male child will turn out to be more productive and useful to the family than the girl child. With no education, the women find hardly any source of livelihood to leverage on. They are economically stagnated and virtually unproductive.
2. Tradition: The Nigerian, as well as African cultural practices in an extension where women are subjected to male dictate, is no longer the norm in modern society and so should be vehemently rejected and discouraged.
3. A girl child should be valued the same way a boy child is valued, honored, celebrated, and respected.
4. A girl child should be valued the same way a boy child is valued, honored, celebrated, and respected. Women should not only be considered 'for the other room' as mischievously put by the Nigerian President, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) some years back but everywhere and at all times.

¹³ < www.thenewhumanitarian.org> assessed 3rd May 2021

5. Women should not be stereotyped in career choices or maternal health decisions that affect them directly. They should no longer be seen, taken or considered as only being useful in the kitchen and ‘the other room.’
6. Religion: Some religions do not allow women the leverage of playing critical roles in the developmental strides of their families or societies. Women should be positively empowered and encouraged to attain excellence. Until recent, it was forbidden for a Christian woman to climb the altar or pulpit to preach the word of God. One will hardly find a woman calling for prayers in the Muslim faith not to mention in traditional societies. In Islam, women are allowed to act as leaders, scholars, ulema, jurists, muftis or spiritual guides. The Wikipedia has opined that those who critic women leading congressional prayers have argued that the religion supports it though sexism in medieval period that opposed women participation as leaders during prayers. The women usually seat behind the male folk during prayers.
7. Many of these restrictions amongst others need to be removed if the Nigerian society is to be better in the nearest future. Women must and should be allowed the opportunity to make their contributions in the affairs of the society because they are part of it. And therefore, has the natural rights to participate in discourses or issues that affect their wellbeing.

1 undpf.com

6.0 CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), violence against women and the girl child hinders the growth of countries, development of individuals, and the progress of societies, with both men and women losing out in the process. On the other hand, the contribution of women to a society is usually through the workforce. In situation when women are not included in the labour force, only a particular portion of the workforce is being used, thus leading to the wastage of economic resources on a large scale.

In a bid to stem the tide of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child, it being not just a Nigerian factor but a global phenomenon, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in September 1995. On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, where representatives of governments and State Parties who were in attendance or who participated at the conference made the following declarations:

Art. 3. Determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity.

Art. 4. Acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere and taking note of the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances, honouring the women who paved the way and inspired by the hope present in the world’s youth.

We affirm our commitment to:

Art. 8. The equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men and other purposes and principles enshrined in the charter of the United Nations, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other International human rights instruments, in particular Convention on

the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Declaration of Elimination of Violence against Women and Declaration on the Right of Development.

We are convinced that:

Art. 13. Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power are furtherance of the above objectives; the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was made at New York on 18th December, 1979. Nigeria signed it on 23rd April, 1984 and ratified it on 13th June, 1985.

Part I Article I provide:

For the purposes of the present convention, the term "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, or human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Article 2

States parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and to this end, undertake...

7.0 FINDING AN ENDURING POLICY VOICE IN NIGERIA'S WAR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE GIRL CHILD

It is not in doubt that numerous laws, conventions, and policies have been made and some are currently still undergoing legislative processes, yet still, women's rights are still being abused and violated. The reason behind this is because it goes beyond making laws and policies but implementation of same as well. That is the essence of this paper, to add voice to the ongoing agitation for better recognition, promotion and protection of the girl child and women's rights as human rights.

In other to secure women rights, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development was established and is maintained in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as well as the State Ministries of Women Affairs in all the 36 States of the Federation. The aim of this Ministry is to promote the development of women and girls with equal rights and corresponding responsibilities. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is presently headed by Mrs. Pauline Tallen. She has repeatedly called for an end to violence against women globally. She called for gender-based indicators in data generation across the country. She has also severally accused promoters and entertainers of prompting abuse of women's bodies by employing vulgar lyrics with female dancers depicted in a most disdainful manner. She hailed the efforts of the National Assembly in creating one hundred and eleven (111) special seats for women in the political arena. The bill was sponsored by the deputy chief whip, Nkeiruka Onyejiocha. This will provide 37 additional

seats in the senate and 74 in the House of Assembly. This reform will address low representation of women in policy formulation.¹⁴

Apart from public institutions, there are other non-governmental organisations that victims of violence and discrimination whether domestic or otherwise can always approach to seek redress whenever they are of the opinion that their rights have been, is being or likely to be breached by virtue of section 46 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. These are as iterated below:

Women Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON). It is involved in programs geared at the enforcement of the rights of Nigerian women and children particularly the girl-child.¹⁵

International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA). It is primarily engaged in promotion, protection and preservation of the rights, interest and wellbeing of women and children through the use of legal framework to ensure that they live free from all forms of discrimination, violence and abuse in the society. FIDA is a non-governmental, non-profit organization made up of women lawyers.¹⁶

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA). It seeks to advance, propagate and protect the rights of women as provided by international, national laws and policies. Socially and economically through the use of information and communication technology. Programmes and projects are initiated in order to educate and empower women and girls.¹⁷ An early interest in computer science and information technology inspire the girls to pursue sustainable careers in these fields.

The Kudirat initiative for democracy (KIND) is a not for profit organization based in Lagos, Nigeria.¹⁸ It is dedicated to the advancement of women and girls educating them on their democratic rights. KIND focuses on developing women's political leadership and governance participation.

Girls Not Brides is an organization dedicated to eradicating child marriage in Nigeria. In Nigeria 43% of girls are married off as child brides before they turn 18 and 17% are are married off before their 15th birthday.¹⁹

This project is championed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Graca Machel and Sonita Alizadeh as a global partnership of civil society of over 95 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls reach their full potential.

Women's Technology Empowerment Center (W.TEC) is an NGO dedicated to educating and empowering women and girls in communication information and technology²⁰.

¹⁴ [www. Icirnigeria.com](http://www.Icirnigeria.com)

¹⁵ www.womenconsortiumofnigeria.org

¹⁶ fida.org.ng

¹⁷ <www.devex.com> organizations assessed 20 July 2021

¹⁸ www.devex.com assessed 20 July 2021

¹⁹ < www.girlsnotbrides.org> assessed 20 July 2021

There are so many others but these ones are adequate to serve the purpose of this article²¹.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This article has x-rayed the fact that we are not in want or shortage of laws, conventions or policies as echoes of voices of the people on the plight of the girl-child and women in general and the need to bring succor but that we are rather in short supply of enforcement mechanisms to give these laws meanings by its implementation²².

To this end, the following measures are suggested:

1. That the Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development should ensure the enforcement of the extant laws on the subject matter.
2. That the Police Act 2020 as amended should be publicized and law enforcement agents trained and retrained on the need to recognize, promote and enforce human rights irrespective of gender.
3. That woman should be educated to know and defend their rights and privileges.
4. That tradition and religious barriers be removed from its impedimentary impact on the exercise of women rights and liberty

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²⁰ www.bellanaija.com

²¹ Women, Business and the law, United Nations Report 2016

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