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# An Appraisal of Violence against Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria: Gender Perspective

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**Abstract:** *The persistent rise in violence against women in Nigeria is alarming despising the 1993 United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. This deliberate disregard to international law in Nigeria despite being a signatory to several human rights instruments has become a growing concern to human rights groups, hence international attention. The paper interrogates violence against women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Nigeria with focus on its Gender affinity. The paper adopts a content analysis which automatically limit the source of data to secondary source. It identified lack of political will, inadequate resources, lack of systematic effort in addressing the menace, slow in ongoing criminal justice reformation and lack of evaluation among others as major challenges in tackling the vice. The paper concluded by recommending amongst political will, availability of adequate fund, systematic effort to address the menace, speedy of ongoing criminal justice reformation process and creation of more research centre for evaluation purpose. Collective efforts in eradicating violence against women in Nigeria is also apt.*

**Keywords:** *Discrimination, Feminine, Gender, Violence, Women.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Every nation in the world still tolerates violence against women, which is a persistent violation of human rights and a significant barrier to attaining gender equality. In Nigeria, most women now encounter it frequently, especially at home (Oladeji 2013). As there is no group of people immune from violence. It is also important to recognize that violence does not only occur in situations involving women. However, violence against them is common because they are seen as the weaker sex and are easier to target. The fact that women are viewed as inferior to their male counterparts is a contributing factor in violence against women.

It is believed that women should submit to male authority since doing so gives men the right to dominate them. Instead of being the result of random, isolated acts of wrongdoing,



violence against women has its roots in the structural relationships of inequality between men and women. This is due to the cultural background and standards that practically all ethnic groups have acquired (Okengbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu, 2002).

Both the government and the human rights community seem to take little action against this menace (Eze, 2010). New forms of violence have however evolved, and in certain nations, strides previously gained by women toward equality and freedom from violence have been reversed or are in danger, a sign that States have not yet confronted it with the requisite political will, visibility, and resources.

Violence against women has become a human rights issue that is high on the world agenda thanks to the connection between women's advocacy and UN programs. The development and adoption of international standards and norms have advanced significantly. International and regional legal and policy instruments have helped to make it apparent that it is the responsibility of States to prevent, outlaw, and punish violence against women. It garnered attention on a global scale when the UN General Assembly released its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 (Heise 1999) referenced in George (2015).

As the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved "to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (United Nations, 2005) cited in Paul, Elechi, and Okoye (2015), the crusade was acknowledged in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000. Internationally recognized legal and regulatory frameworks address a wide range of violence in both public and private contexts. However, much work needs to be done to establish an environment where women can live without encountering gender-based violence (United Nations, 2006a).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Violence against women has become a burning issue of human rights and household discussion due to its widespread in the world and this is especially in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. The breadth and depth of violence against women are a reflection of the severity and tenacity of discrimination that women still experience. Its upsurge in Nigeria is a concern to all most especially human rights groups and the international community. It is prevalent in Nigeria society, even the educated elite who supposed to orientate the society of the consequences of the sharp discrimination perpetrate it in a way open to the informed set of people, thereby making it a norm of the society. Women are more likely to experience several forms of gender-based violence. The violence committed by women against women is the most heinous type of violence Because of their status. Hence, it has become one of the major threat to social-political development.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to examine violence against women in Nigeria with a view to understanding its social-political implications on Nigeria society.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Analysis**

Violence is defined differently depending on the scholar's background and the current context. Violence refers to rough handling, the unjustified use of physical force against others, and intended harm. It is seen as an act of human suffering, snubs, and discrimination



that causes or is likely to cause unlawful physical and mental harm (UN, 1993). The application of physical force that results in harm or damage, intense natural force or energy, an abusive use of force, passion, rage, disturbance, and sacrilege are some terms used to characterize it (US Office, 2004; Uzuegbunam, 2013).

The concept of women originates from the common impression of sex in creatures that can or do develop eggs and give birth to young. It has to do with any type of reproductive structure that has parts and need to be fertilized by male parts. It unites adult women and girls since they all possess characteristics of the feminine gender (Arinze, 2008). Violence against women is viewed as gendered violence that is committed against them simply because they are women. (Uzuegbunam, 2013).

Abuse is defined as any assault on a woman that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm to her. This includes threats of such behaviour, coercion, or willful deprivations of liberty (United Nations, 1993). It amounts to discrimination and breaches human rights.

In Nigeria, a woman's conception of herself and her place in society are determined by her biology, culture, history, institutions, and social setting. Women are viewed as the biological embodiment of the feminine gender. Culturally, women are seen as impure beings that should be subordinate to men and hence not given a voice in any decision-making. In the past, women were thought of as insignificant beings who were unable to make a significant contribution to the advancement of society. Contemporarily, history has shown that women have the potential to advance society. Women in Nigeria are viewed as institutions in the institutional framework, even if they are seen as second-class members of society who go about things in their own way.

Women are viewed as catalysts in some instances and as agents of doom in others, though this depending on the circumstances. For instance, they are perceived as experts in dispute resolution but are viewed as inferior and insignificant when it comes to sharing in rewards and payouts. The state of masculine and feminine serve as the basis for the concept of gender. It has to do with how people's sex structures influence how they behave. It is a divide of the population into male and female groups, which in turn affects how they view domestic abuse and women in Nigerian society (Dukor, 2010). Further, Dukor (2010) asserts that the gender stress ontology has three major stages, as follows:

- ❖ Stage "A" exhibits no gender differentiation. As people innocently understood themselves as one species of human, it is known as gender classless.
- ❖ The second stage "B," sometimes referred to as the gender community, is a phase of social interaction and cooperative healthy procreation.
- ❖ The third stage of colonial experiences, denoted by the letter "C," denotes a period of extreme gender inequality as a result of modern systems that ignored African ontology.

The current condition, which inspired feminist studies, is the final stage. According to Dukor (2010), violence against women should be addressed from a female perspective since the majority of suffering is brought on by women themselves or by the institutionalization of cultural standards.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study uses a historical approach, hence it is descriptive. It involves presenting data thematically in accordance with the historical method. The complexity of human interactions



is shown in this title on violence against women. The work utilized secondary materials as its source. The secondary source include archival materials and view from the various scholars that deal with the issue of womenfolk. This study therefore draws insights from such approaches.

### **The Context and Causes of Violence against Women in Nigeria**

There is no specific culture, area, or nation that is exempt from violence against women. Many varied elements, including education level, economic standing, color, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, and culture, influence its various expressions as well as the experiences of women. Understanding the complex framework from which violence against women arises and the associated risk factors begins with the acknowledgment of this violence as a form of discrimination and a human rights violation. Numerous investigations have been conducted to determine the root causes of violence against women. According to studies, no single factor fully explains violence against women (Harway and O'Neil, 1999; and WHO, 2005). The following are some of the underlying root causes that have been found:

The patriarchal factor is one of the structural reasons of violence against women. There is no culture, nation, or society in the world that has manage to protect women from assault. This indicated the role of patriarchy. Men are required by patriarchy to control and exert dominance over women. Additionally, it has established the cultural ideologies of male superiority over females and women subjugation to men. In Nigeria, patriarchy has become entrenched in both the legal system and the political/governmental systems. Although it limits women's options, it does not make them helpless.

There is fundamental tenet of violence against women within the framework of human rights. The more general backdrop of systematic subordination and gender-based discrimination against women informs the specific causes and rise in the danger of its occurrence. The history of uneven power relations between men and women, which are reflected in both public and private life, makes this abundantly obvious (United Nations, 2006a). Economic injustice, sexist cultural norms, and patriarchal power imbalances all contribute to the denial of women's human rights and the continuation of violence. A higher risk of violence against women has also been linked to the use of violence to settle disputes, notions of privacy, state inaction, and individual/family behavior patterns such experiences of abuse.

Violence against women that goes unpunished worsens its effectiveness as a tool of control. The Nigerian government's failure to hold the abusers accountable worsens the exploitation and powerlessness of women. Society is also shown to tolerate male violence against women as natural and normal. This cleverly normalized violent behavior patterns. However, as determined by the South African Constitutional Court in 1999, the South African government has a clear duty to provide protection from domestic abuse. The rights to equality and nondiscrimination were connected with the right to protection (South Africa, 1999).

The impact of culture is another unimportant factor that encourages violence against women. Certain social and cultural norms, such as those connected to harmful customs like female genital mutilation, child marriage, and son preference; crimes committed in the name of honor; unequal criminal penalties based on religious laws; customs of polygamy, wife inheritance, and discriminatory bride price; and limitations on women's rights in marriage, have long been identified as contributing factors to violence against women (United Nations, 2006).



Economic inequality and discrimination are part of major factors of violence against women and broader economic trends that create enabling conditions for such violence (Merry, 2003). It also shows up in areas like work, income, access to other financial resources, and women's lack of financial independence. However, having access to financial resources can improve women's ability to make wise decisions.

The disruptive effects of globalization have significantly increased the threat of violence against women. Because many preexisting societal norms already justified and validated various forms of violence against women, the social changes brought on by globalization often result in new forms that revalidate the deteriorated existing forms of violence against women, including trafficking on a worldwide scale. (Sassen, 2002).

Traditional types of violence against women have become more widespread due to the breakdown of traditional gender norms and new iterations of gender subordination that push women to labour predominantly in low-paying, sex-segregated industries. Despite challenging economic migration and industrialization trends, women can earn more money outside of the confines of traditional gender roles (United Nations, 2004).

Violence against women has been institutionalized as a result of systemic gender inequality and the subjection of women. Individual behaviors, personal histories, including alcoholism and a history of violence exposure, the use of force to settle political and economic issues, the use of rape as a weapon of war, and atrocities directed at women all abet the vice. More concerning is the connection between widespread social acceptance of violence as a form of conflict resolution and political endorsement of it.

### **Different Forms of Violence against Women in Nigeria**

There are two basically types of violence which are physical and psychological violence. The former is intentionally using of physical force, strength or a weapon to harm the victim, while the latter involves controlling or isolating and humiliating or embarrassing the victim. However, other forms of violence directly linked to the two major types are highlighted below:

**1. Sexual Violence:** Sexual violence against women by intimate relationships does happen, and it also happens frequently in Nigeria amongst non-partners. The term "non-partners" refers to individuals who are a relative, friend, acquaintance, neighbour, coworker, or complete stranger (United Nations, 2006b). Gifts in exchange for sex can be used to entice women and young girls into sexual relationships. These categories are vulnerable to being raped. Under Nigeria's justice system and cultural norms, the suffering that rape survivors endure is made worse purposely because the perpetrators are not held accountable.

**2. Harmful Traditional Practices:** These harmful traditional practices are established cultural norms. However, there has been violence against women for so long in some cultures and nations that it is still happening now. These infractions consist of:

❖ **Female Genital Mutilation:** It alludes to ingrained, customary cutting procedures carried out on women and girls. The conventional justification for it is that it preserves chastity and genital purity. Almost two million girls are at danger of FGM each year, with more than 130 million living females who have had the procedure having done so primarily in Africa and several Middle Eastern nations (United Nations, 2006b).

❖ **Honour Killings:** Women who have violated their chastity, which is seen as an affront to the family's honour in some Nigerian communities, have all been murdered by their



relatives. This includes women who have been accused of adultery or suspected of having extramarital sex. Annual estimates of such victims range up to 5,000 women (UNFPA, 2000) in Paul, et al. (2015).

- ❖ **Early Marriage:** The practice of early marriage negates peace and security of any nation because it is a form of sexual violence. It also jeopardizes women rights to health and limits their chance of attending school. Younger daughters are given to marriage as a means of gaining economic security and to avoid responsibility. This archaic practice is still more prevalent in Northern part of Nigeria in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There is also high possibility of young girls being kidnapped during conflict, and marrying them off at an early age (United Nations, 2002).

**3. Human Trafficking:** Trafficking involves the use of trickery, compulsion, and threats, to recruit, transport, transfer, and harbour in order to maintain them in a state of slavery or forced labour (Adedeji, 2022). Violence against women is exactly what is happening in this situation. According to Ertürk (2006), women are trafficked into a range of informal economic sectors, including prostitution, domestic work, street begging, mining, agriculture, and cottage industries. Although victims of trafficking might be of either sexes, women are almost always the majority. Compared to other states of the federation, Edo and Delta, has a higher prevalence of it.

**4. Economic Violence:** It includes denying a woman access to and control over basic resources. This denial tailored toward women is rampant in areas such as employment opportunity, income status, lack of economic independence and access to other economic resources such as inheritance among others (Saltzman, McMahon and Shelley, 2002).

**5. State Agents Violence:** State-authorized acts of violence against women and girls include rape, molestation, torture, and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. A State's laws and practices may also result in violence against women (Ijekhemen, 2013). In a similar vein, States may indirectly support violence against women through weak or poor enforcement of existing laws, essentially giving offenders of such crimes impunity for their deeds (Ijekhemen, 2013).

**6. Violence against Women in Armed Conflict:** It is widely acknowledged and documented that there is a lot of violence against women during armed conflict, particularly sexual assault (United Nations, 2006a). During armed conflict, women are subjected to many forms of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse that is perpetrated by both state-sponsored and non-state actors. These forms include but not limited to murder, abductions, forced recruitment, maiming and mutilation, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, inhuman treatment, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and forced sterilisation fighters (NGO, 2002).

### **Consequences of Violence against Women**

Violence against women has long-lasting effects on the victims, their offspring, and society at large. According to Silverman, Mucci and Hathaway (2001), the following are listed as the possible consequences of violence against women:

- 1) Women who encounter violence abuse face a number of health issues, which also affects their capacity to work and take part in society.
- 2) Women's power to act and make decisions has significantly decreased as a result of economic inequality and discrimination, which also makes them more vulnerable to violence by making women and their families less wealthy.



- 3) The government is responsible for paying the costs of political and social instability brought on by the intergenerational transmission of violence as well as the money needed for programs that assist victims and survivors of violence.
- 4) Due to rape's increased chance of unwanted pregnancy, sexual violence against women commonly results in depression-related death. Maternal mortality, femicide, suicide, AIDS-related deaths, and other lethal outcomes of violence against women are possible.
- 5) Alcohol and drug abuse is more prevalent among women who have experienced violence. Violence against women is also linked to sexual dysfunction, suicide attempts, post-traumatic stress disorder, and central nervous system diseases.
- 6) It decreases economic output, depletes resources from employers and public agencies, and slows the development of human capital.
- 7) Their offspring are much more likely to experience emotional issues, behavioural issues, poor academic performance, and health issues.

### **Challenges in Combating Violence against Women**

For Nigeria state to combat or eradicate violence against women, there are numbers of hindrances encounter as there is no problem free life. Some, not all the challenges are enumerated below:

1. **Lack of Political Will:** There is no political will to address the vice. This is resulted to failure to create and maintain a political and social environment where violence against women is not tolerated. Hence, state efforts to address violence against women are neither consistent nor sustained.
2. **Lack of Funds:** Addressing violence against women calls for continuous financing. Insufficient funding for combating violence against women suggests a lack of political will. States and donors are the primary sources of support. Such initiatives have generally received insufficient funding from the state. Donor funding is frequently project-driven, not consistent, and occasionally out of step with the goals of women's groups working on these issues.
3. **Lack of Systematic Effort:** It has been determined that one obstacle to combating the issue of violence against women at the national level is a lack of organized effort. The vice typically receives less attention as a serious criminal than other types of crime or violations of human rights.
4. **Lack of a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach:** It is well known that comprehensive and coordinated multi-sectorial efforts by many stakeholders are necessary to stop violence against women, yet these efforts are rarely made on a significant scale or for a long length of time. Although models of fully integrated approaches have been created, they have only sometimes been put into practice, and attempts to replicate them have not always been successful due to the lack of essential elements, such as resources.
5. **Failure to End Impunity:** Although efforts to reform criminal justice systems, such as the adoption of new laws and more efficient implementation of legislation, are underway, the process is gradual, but slow. As a result, those who harm women continue to get away with it.
6. **Lack of Evaluation:** Despite the fact that research on interventions has grown significantly, it is still difficult to identify the most effective approaches. This is partially



because there are not enough resources available to create the working methodologies required to stop violence against women.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The work has noted that violence against women is a symptom of society, which is embroiled in moral and cultural decadence. Violence against women is a threat to peace and stability as well as cancerous to the growth and development of Nigeria state. Its prevalence in the society is blamed on all including, the family, the ethnic group, the governments and the society at large. Realizing the havoc which violence against women has wrecked on Nigeria society or community, this call for collaborative efforts of all stakeholders in Nigeria in its eradication as this will create conducive environment for peace and development. Similarly, bringing back family institution into glorious past and prepare the nation for better days thereby making women the mother of nation; there is therefore the need to rediscover and orientate the society the need to respect uniqueness of womenfolk in Nigeria.

#### **Recommendations**

However, a lot of scholars and researchers have studied the issue of violence against women, and a lot of suggestions have been made to try to put an end to it. The following recommendations are made in light of the study's findings:

1. Political will ensure radical efforts by government functionary to take decisive action to address the vice. This will be coupled with the combine efforts of international organisation and women movement to fathom out ways to eradicate the menace of violence against women.
2. Government should make available adequate fund, as efforts to address violence against women require a sustained funding stream. State and donors should improve in funding the project as it fund-driven. The funding should also be sustained.
3. Systematic effort in addressing the menace at both the national level and Non-Governmental level is suggested for effective handling of the crime. Adequate emphasis should be laid on the crime as other forms of crime or human rights abuse.
4. There should be large and sustained comprehensive and integrated approach by multiple stakeholders to eliminate the vice. Vital component such as resources should be made available for successful implementation.
5. The process of ongoing criminal justice reformation need speedy effort to quickly stop the continuous impunity enjoying by perpetrators of violence against women. Ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice is an addition to increasing the penalties for violence against women.
6. Government should create more research centre to identify the major causes of violence against women in line with Nigeria factor and as well provide Nigeria based strategy in tackling the menace. Sufficient resources should be provided for the project for effective delivery.





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