THEORIZING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Gender-Based Violence GBV is predominant in almost every human societies, and more especially in developing country like Nigeria. Different predisposing factors such as age, income, gender and cultural practices contributes to aggressive and violent behaviour on the basis of gender in Nigeria. Often times aggressive behaviors and practices endangers victims thereby leading to psychological trauma, poor physical health and even death. The paper proceeded through a secondary search methodology by evaluating the arguments of Social Learning Theory and Feminist Theory on GBV. The paper concluded with recommendations on proper socialization within the family on the effects of gender-based violence and the needs for victims to speak out and seeking for help. It also, advocates for the repealing of obsolete laws and cultural practices that impedes equality and development of both boys and girls in the society.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Socialization, Culture, Feminism, Social Learning

Introduction:

The socially constructed traits of women, males, girls, and boys are considered gender. This includes social interactions and the expectations, customs, and roles that come with being a man, woman, girl, or boy. Gender is an evolving social concept that differs from culture to culture. In its report on violence against women and children, the World Health Organization defined violence as "the intentional use of threat, physical force or power, or actual, another person, against a group or community, against oneself, or that has a high likelihood of resulting in psychological harm, injury, death, or mal-development" (WRVH) (United Nations 2020:136). Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to acts of violence committed against a person solely based on that person's gender or acts of violence that disproportionately harm people of a particular gender. According to the United Nations (2020:16), all acts of gender-based violence that cause or are likely to cause physical harm, sexual harm, psychological harm, economic harm, or suffering to women are considered to be acts of violence against women and are considered to be violations of human

rights as well as a form of discrimination against women. A broad definition offered by O'Toole and Schiffman (1997:43), includes "any interpersonal, organizational, or politically motivated violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or position in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems such as family, the military, organizations, or the labour force." This concept is advantageous in that it may encompass not only violence against women

because they are women but also animosity towards other gender minorities while highlighting the systemic context of inequality in which this hostility tends to emerge.

Gender-based violence against women, men, or kids in the same household is included. Although GBV primarily affects women and girls, it harms families and communities. Its roots are in detrimental norms, power abuse, and gender inequity. Therefore, gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant human rights issue that threatens one's health and safety.

It crosses age, gender, religious, social, and economic borders and is the most pervasive yet least apparent human rights violation in the entire globe (Jhpiego 2018:5). GBV is characterized by misusing victims' power and control over their bodies, emotions, or finances, eroding their self-respect, dignity, and sense of sovereignty (Jhpiego 2018:10; UNICEF 2020:18).

Predisposing Factors of Gender-Based Violence

- **Age**

  According to the World Health Organization (WHO), women who are between 15 and 44 ages are more likely to die or become disabled as a result of gender violence than from cancer, malaria, auto accidents, and war put together.

- **Income Level**

  According to a study conducted in Zambia, there is no consistent correlation between women's experience of violence and wealth. However, as compared to women in the other quintiles, those with the highest levels of wealth have the lowest rates of marital violence (42 per cent) (46-51 per cent) (Zambia Health Survey 2013:4).

- **Culture/Gender**

  Previous studies have asserted that one of the primary causes of Gender Based Violence is a nation's culture and traditional practices. The gendered nature of society, in which men are valued more highly than women, is the basis of the problem of gender-based violence. In addition, women and girls are more exposed to violence due to unequal power relations. Acceptance of violence in the community is one of the factors influencing the statistics displayed. According to the Demographic Health Survey (2013:45), a sizable percentage of both men (48%) and women (62%) think it is acceptable for a husband to hit or beat his wife under specific conditions. The fact that women are more likely than males to report domestic violence to the police can also is supported by this.

Gender-Based Violence against Women

Gender-based violence against women is "any act that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations 1995:67 Platform for Action D.112). Intimate partner violence, coercive sex, rape, stalking, and child sexual abuse are all included in this definition, which was developed at the Beijing United Nations Conference on Women in 1995. It represents an international consensus on how to conceive the dynamics of gender-based violence.

According to the most recent statistics on gender-based violence, 8 to 70% of women globally have experienced physical and/or sexual assault from a male partner at least once in their life (Heise, Ellsberg and Guttermoeller 1999:34). According to DHS data from Zambia, 13% of 15–19-

year-olds experienced sexual coercion in the previous year, and 27% of ever-married women reported being beaten by their partner or spouse (Zambia Health Survey 2002:08). In rural Ethiopia, 49% of women who had ever been in a relationship had ever been physically abused by an intimate partner, while 59% had ever been sexually abused (WHO 2005:34).

All of these variances could be the result of underreporting, stigma, shame, or other societal and cultural elements that discourage women from talking about violent incidents (Krug, Dahlberg and Mercy 2002:40). Another hospital-based study in Nairobi found that 61.5% of cases involved sexual abuse, while 38.5% involved physical attacks (Saidi, Awori and Odula 2008:8). The majority of gender-based violence perpetrators, or 72.3%, were married, and in 10.1% of determining cases, alcohol played a key role.

In a study of Igbo villages in Nigeria, 58.9% of women reported being raped while pregnant, and 21.3% said they had been coerced into having sex (Okemgbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu 2002:4).

Violence against women has been made legal, invisible, sexualized, and assisted to continue by a number of factors, including gender norms and expectations, male entitlement, sexual objectification, and differences in power and status.

Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Gender-based violence is an issue in Nigeria, as it is in other sub-Saharan African nations, possibly due to the mechanisms of dominance and exploitation that are frequently promoted through the concept of patriarchy (Ani 2012:6). The problem of sex-based violence, pervasive in Nigeria today, confronts women daily. Nwanaju (2010:9), claims that Nigeria is one of those nations where local laws have not yet been successfully updated to reflect international human rights treaties. The LSG(2011:5), highlighted that Nigeria has well-equipped policy frameworks to address problems relating to social inclusion and gender equality. The nation has ratified several significant regional and international agreements.

Nigeria needs to address the issue of violence against men, women, boys and girls. One in three girls and women between the ages of 15 and 24 has suffered violence (Nwanaju 2010:12). Men have perpetrated violent assaults against women, both married and single. Recently, rape, sexual assault, brutality and victimization, and domestic violence against girls and women have increased in Nigeria. Victims are sometimes too ashamed to disclose such incidents to the appropriate authorities for justice.

A 2005 study by Amnesty International on Nigeria states that family members frequently beat and mistreat women for alleged offences, rape them, and even kill them. Brutal acid attacks have sometimes left individuals with horrifying disfigurements. Unfortunately, such violence is frequently justified, accepted, and not condemned in communities. Fathers, partners, and husbands are primarily to blame for violence against women.

GBV has adverse effects on employment, productivity, and total economic growth, in addition to its adverse effects on health. Due to perceived stigmatization from family and friends, GBV remains hidden in a culture of silence despite these repercussions. Many survivors who seek justice are accused, subjected to retaliation, or shunned by their families and communities, which drives them farther into destitution, loneliness, and violent crime (World Health Organization 2020:6; UNICEF 2020:9; Perrin, Marsh, Clough, Desgroppes, Phanuel and Abdi 2019:23).

In order to fully comprehend gender-based violence, it is necessary to examine different gender-based theories, such as social learning and Feminist theories, and their applications and

perspectives provide background knowledge of the topic under discussion. Examining the theories will benefit significantly from the interdisciplinary study because it is necessary on several levels. First, the situational, structural, and cultural context will reflect the psychological significance of actions and experiences for the perpetrator, victim, and outside observer. Examining the processes of gender-based violence must consider, in particular, the cultural discourse that justifies gender disparities in social and economic position objectifies women and sexualizes violence.

Theorizing Gender and its Relation to Intimate Violence

All too frequently, a theory that has looked at how gender affects violence against women equates gender with the categories of male and female. As a result, gender is considered a personal characteristic of the individual (Archer 2003:8). Thoughts about gender have progressed well beyond the old "sex difference" paradigms. Although important, research based on such models is not very instructive when it comes to understanding gender dynamics as they are currently understood.

The meanings of being female or male in a given situational context are currently determined by gender, which is hypothesized as a complex, multilayer cultural construct. Gender is often allocated at birth based on biological sex and arranged around the social categories of male and female in Western civilization (which may be defined anatomically or genetically, depending on the situation). Contrary to popular belief, a category's definition is not the same as the cultural package that gives it its meaning. New theories that explain how different aspects of gender mediate and moderate the effects of social, psychological, and biological factors over the course of a person's life and influence the risk, experience, and outcomes of interpersonal violence between women and men are necessary to reduce gender-based violence. However, one thing that can currently be inferred is that gender-based violence has a variety of predictors, meanings, and results that vary for men and women, both as offenders and as victims.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

There are a variety of theories that attempt to explain why men and women act violently toward one another. Albert Bandura firmly believed that while some think that conduct results from conscious choice, it originates deep inside the brain (McCue 2008:9). According to the Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Akers 1973:17), every aspect of human behaviour is acquired and changed through the same social psychology process. More specifically, the following four mechanisms are shared by criminal, conforming, and deviant behaviours:

1) Differential associations,
2) Differential Reinforcement,
3) Imitation, and
4) Definitions Favorable to Breaking the Law.

The idea of differential association focuses on the significance of the primary, secondary, and reference groups that people engage with daily. Family and friends are two examples of the key groups. Examples of secondary and reference groups are teachers, churchgoers, neighbours, and persons of authority. Differential affiliations are the first step in social learning because these groups create the environments where social learning processes can take place. The social

learning theory is the one that best explains gender-based violence. According to the social learning hypothesis, money, stress, and alcoholism can all trigger violent behaviour. We begin to learn conduct from our parents at a young age. In actuality, our parents and guardians influence our actions, attitudes, and interpersonal interactions. We continue the learnt behaviour into maturity. Modelling is one posited method of generational transfer. There is proof that many abusive behaviour patterns are associated with seeing or experiencing violence (Murrell, Christoff and Henning 2007:19).

Application of the Theory

Over time, children who witness the same conduct grow numb to the abuse and violence and start to accept it as usual. It is more than just poor role modelling when a guy is violent against the mother of a child. This is poor parenting. Face it, as parents; we set an example for our children. We instruct our kids verbally and physically. Children who are unsure of right and wrong can become confused and begin to imitate the actions they see. Children who grow up in households with frequent acts of violence will lash out at, bite, and push their peers, siblings, and classmates as a way of acting out. According to the social learning hypothesis, children who witness violence being rewarded learn how to use it and develop favourable attitudes toward it (Dutton and Holtzworth-Munroe 1997:103; Kalmuss 1984:77).

This implies that children who have experienced violence or abuse pick up negative conflict resolution and communication skills. According to Sternberg et al. (1997:55), Bandura's social learning theory would anticipate that viewers and victims can be affected, with kids from more violent contexts being more likely to pick up aggressive ways of conduct. A 2007 study by Murrell, Christoff, & Henning suggests that aggressive behaviour will eventually spill over into intimate relationships as they age. Consider the social learning theory: Individuals observe their surroundings and others to gain knowledge. Children learn more than what is appropriate when they see aggressive behavior in the home.

1. Violence and threats are effective methods of obtaining what one wants;
2. one can choose to be the aggressor or the victim;
3. victims are to blame for violence;
4. when people inflict harm on others, they are not punished;
5. women are weak, helpless, incompetent, stupid, or violent;
6. anger or intoxication are triggers for violence, and those who are close to one can harm them as well;
7. Unhealthy, unfair relationships are typical or expected; Women have no legal entitlement to be treated with respect because men are in charge and control their lives.

Children have distorted ideas about what a relationship should be by the time they reach puberty. They struggle with problem-solving and cannot come up with constructive answers to everyday problems. The media also has a negative impact by desensitizing our children to violent video games and films that show domestic violence and men abusing women.

Socially, our youth suffer emotionally and become highly perplexed, especially if their homes are not secure, wholesome, and supportive. Teenage girls may find it difficult to form healthy relationships; they may worry about abusing others or abusing others in intimate relationships,

mainly when there is conflict; they may shy away from intimacy or seek it out too soon, or they may choose to get pregnant to create their support system (Cunningham and Baker 2007:62)

According to a significant study, men who, as children, witnessed allegations of abuse and violence are nine times more likely to act as abusers in romantic relationships. Men who reported witnessing gender-based violence were also more prone to threaten and attack their relationships verbally. Furthermore, these guys were more likely to confess to abusing their intimate relationships verbally and physically the more physically abusive they had been (Wareham, Boots, and Chavez 2009:44).

We learn by watching others. When domestic violence assaults are commonplace, we lose awareness of the actual problem. The act of violence becomes commonplace and a method of resolving personal problems. The social learning hypothesis is unquestionably the best approach to describe how violent behaviour is passed down from generation to generation. "A youngster who experiences violence is permanently altered, but not permanently "damaged. We can do many things to improve tomorrow (Cunningham and Baker 2007:6).

Feminist Theory of Gender-Based Violence

The observed increases in female crime and violence in popular culture were and continue to be mistakenly attributed to feminism. In this setting, reports of rising female crime and violence rates have typically been met with scepticism from feminist scholars (Alder and Worrall 2004:7; Chesney-Lind and Irwin 2008:8), who are understandably defensive in light of myths that oversimplifying equal attribute opportunity, girl power, the rise of women's liberation, or feminism as the primary cause. The contentious "sisters in crime" thesis, which claimed that as women's status as equal to men increased, so would the frequency and nature of women's crime, violence, and aggression, was the catalyst for the creation of this myth in the 1970s (Adler 1975:12).

The argument was refined in the 1980s to contend that young women were exhibiting overt aggression more frequently, partly because women's liberation had increased their economic and sexual freedom and removed some of the restrictions and unofficial social controls on traditional sex roles (Campbell 1981:87). However, as we saw above, the Ladette thesis has recently been used to frame feminism as the cause of the masculinization of femininity and the increase in females acting out. The main problem with the claim that feminism increases female criminality and violence is that research on female offenders consistently shows that few support women's emancipations (Campbell 1981:87; Chesney Lind and Sheldon 2004:23).

It is improbable that supporters of the women's movement may be found among delinquent girls and criminal women, as Carol Smart once famously stated (Smart 1976:5). Females who behave violently may be familiar with 'F' words, but feminism is not generally of them. Female violence calls into question the long-held beliefs of feminists, attorneys, criminologists, media pundits, parents, and policymakers. The criminological theory has a long history of essentializing violence as a trait primarily found in males, ignoring the ability of the feminine sex to engage in and inflict violence. Therefore, it should be no surprise that feminist criminologists have failed to identify violent female criminals, presuming that women are typically the victims of violence rather than its perpetrators (Wesley 2006:60)

Application of the Theory

One of the key achievements of feminist theory has been to direct critical attention to the fact that men's violence far outweighs that for which women and girls are responsible. However, a nuanced theory of female violence that takes into account the context, politics, power relations, gender dynamics, and intersectionality of particular cases of female violence is still largely absent from feminist criminology. The biggest drawback of not having a sophisticated feminist theory of female violence is that when cases of female violence become newsworthy, it leaves unchallenged anti-feminist explanations that are generally prevalent in popular culture.

Feminism was and still is frequently used as the false scapegoat for incidents and rises in female violence because of anti-feminist backlash politics. Therefore, rather than just denying, rationalizing, or erasing the historical changes in gendered patterns of violence, a significant question for feminist study in the future is how to do so. A feminist theory of violence was outlined by Claire Renzetti, an internationally renowned academic and editor of Violence Against Women (Renzetti 1999:75).

This sketch suggests that feminist conceptions of violence should be contextualized rather than being abstract and essentialist. They must explore the particularity of the circumstances in which women employ violence, how it varies, and what it entails. This will require a whole new series of qualitative research projects taking women's experiences of violence as offenders as a starting point. Furthermore, the analysis must be intersectional and not just focus on one gender. In order to incorporate these various viewpoints and views, Renzetti also contends that a feminist theory of female violence must be developed through a collaborative study involving academics, practitioners, and violent women.

Finally, Renzetti contends that feminists must take responsibility for the issue of women's violence (Renzetti 1999:44). For feminism to be relevant in the public discourse concerning increased - albeit frequently exaggerated - social concerns about escalating female violence, the silence must be broken through with a practical and persuasive method.

Policies and Way Forward

Various laws and public education campaigns have been launched globally to lessen gender-based violence against men and women, which the United Nations has designated as a worldwide health and development concern (United Nations 1989:42). However, the prevalence and types of violence, particularly violence against intimate partners, differ significantly among cultures (Kishor and Johnson 2004:207). For example, according to recent studies conducted in the United States, men and women frequently shove, hit, or throw objects at one another, and there is little gender difference in the prevalence of such behaviours.

 Nigeria has robust policy frameworks to promote social inclusion and gender equality. The nation has ratified several significant regional and international treaties to address social exclusion and gender inequality. These are just a few examples, including the Beijing Platform for Action (1995:7), the Millennium Development Goals (2000:55), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2005:8), and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD 2006:75). Another is the 1979 Convention on the Eradication of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In addition, the Child Rights Act was passed by Nigeria independently in 2003 and has since been domesticated in 18 states. However,

the National Gender Policy, which was regarded as a successful reform in 2006, lacks explicitly stated penalties for violence against women.

The first novel law in the nation, the Lagos State Domestic Violence Prevention Law of 2007, has been complicated to implement.

LSG (2011:96), claims that various laws and policies that Lagos state has passed and adopted obligate it to promote social inclusion and gender equality. To name a few of them:

a. Domestic Violence Prevention Law (2007)
b. Child Rights Law (2007)
c. Law protecting the rights of those who are disabled (2010)
d. HIV/AIDS anti-discrimination legislation from 2007
e. National Gender Policy (2006)
f. Health policies for mothers and children in daycare

As stated by the LSG (2011:37), the difficulty is that many of these laws and policies still need to be turned into programs that will help the individuals for they were created. This challenge relates to four significant gaps in the ministries, departments, and agencies (MDA) and sector planning procedures. They are as follows:

i. Lack of data and information that is broken down by sex and gender;
ii. insufficient stakeholder consultations and communication;
iii. insufficient G&SI expertise and abilities.
iv. Poor cross-sectoral coordination

Above all, the expectation that the federal government would imitate this initiative and develop comparable policy measures against violence against women, supported by suitable sanctions, has not come to pass.

In order to advance gender equality and inclusivity in development, all states in Nigeria agreed upon and ratified Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2006:90). The problem, though, is that many of these regulations do not clearly define the proper penalties for societal wrongdoing and violations of women's rights, like violence against women based on their gender. The Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are tasked with converting policy declarations into action plans, allocating funding, and overseeing their execution. However, these have not yet been turned into programs that will help the people for whom they were created, which is the reality on the ground. As a result, it is critical to provide the necessary sector MDAs with full financial and material assistance to develop programs that will help the public understand the policies. Inadequate stakeholder consultations and communication, insufficient knowledge and skills related to gender and social inclusion (G&SI), insufficient inter-sectoral coordination, and a lack of sex and gender-disaggregated data and information are all associated with this challenge, according to LSG (2011:70).

Conclusion

The study adopted social learning and feminist theories as theoretical frameworks for the topic. The theories have been able to explicitly explain the menace of gender-based violence as a social concern that requires consistent effort towards mitigating it. Social and economic signs of progress are seriously threatened by gender-based violence. It is important to note that gender-

based violence is not limited to violence against women alone but for all sexes, as explicated in the study. However, women and children are the most affected by the problem. Gender-based violence hinders harmony and progress and is a danger to the goal of equality.

The fundamental rights, liberties, health, and welfare of people are frequently violated by violence against them. It is done in various places by various people, including family members, friends, coworkers, employers, and the government. In actuality, most violent acts seem to be religious, cultural, or traditional practices that maintain the lowest possible status for victims in Nigeria. In the past, gender-based violence in Nigeria received little to no attention, which only legitimized the behavior.

However, the threat was anticipated to decrease in Nigeria due to the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) and other pertinent policies of the international and national governments and other stakeholders (UN, 1997). Unfortunately, the policies to eliminate gender imbalance were ambiguous regarding the penalties for offenders. Gender-based violence has persisted as a severe threat to human lives in Nigeria due to this and the inefficient execution of these laws.

Recommendations

- Socialization: According to the Social Learning Theory, gender-based violence is learned in the society. It is therefore suggested that parents teach their children the right cultural practice that frown against sex dominance and aggressions.
- Gender-based violence is not restricted to the male gender. Both men and women can be perpetrator and victims of gender-based violence as advocated by the feminist theory. Therefore, victims of gender-based violence regardless of the gender involved should speak up and speak out. Victims should be encouraged not to stay silent but seek help.
- Challenge beliefs on masculinity: beliefs and cultural practices that reinforce aggression towards men and women should be challenged and abolished.
- The government and civil society organizations should fund women`s organizations that fight gender-based violence.
- The legislative arms of the government must push for stronger laws that discourages gender-based violence in the society. Also, laws that support women`s leadership in the country.
- Advocacy on gender-based violence: Civil societies must educate the public on the dangers of cultural and religious practices that poses threats to both and women in the society.

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