



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

Gender is an evolving social concept that differs from culture to culture. It is a socially constructed trait of women, males, girls, and boys and several other forms which the world is recognizing. This includes social interactions and the expectations, customs, and roles that come with being a man, woman, girl, or boy and other variations. 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 the 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, sexual, psychological, economic harm or suffering to women are considered to be acts of violence against women, violation 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.

Although GBV primarily affects women and girls, children are not left out. It harms families and communities. Its roots are in detrimental norms, power abuse, and gender inequity. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant human rights issue that threatens one's health and safety.

The paper discusses the social problem of gender based violence, factors that predispose women to GBV, it views the subject through the lens of social learning theory and feminism to explain the phenomenon of gender based violence and how it plays out in human society. The paper also highlights some recommendations and conclusion.

Predisposing Factors of Gender-Based Violence

There are several factors that predispose women to violence. Studies have shown that women in developing countries are more at risk of gender-based violence than women from the West. Some factors are discussed below:

i. 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-based violence than from cancer, malaria, auto accidents, and war put together.

ii. 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).

iii. 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. 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 support the fact that more women are predisposed to violence than men.

Gender-Based Violence against Women in Nigeria

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). The definition developed by the Beijing United Nations Conference on Women in 1995 includes Intimate partner violence, coercive sex; rape, stalking, and child sexual abuse are all included in this definition, which was developed at. It represents an international consensus on how to conceive the dynamics of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is widespread across age, gender, religious, social, and economic borders and it is the most pervasive yet least apparent human rights violation in the entire globe (Jhpiego 2018:5; UNICEF 2020:18). Estimates published by World Health Organization (2020) indicate that globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime, most forms of GBV is intimate partner violence. Globally, almost one third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner (WHO, 2020).

A study by the Zambia Health Survey reports that 13% of 15–19-year-olds experienced sexual coercion in the previous year, and 27% of married women reported being beaten by their partner or spouse (Zambia Health Survey 2013). 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).

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.

Gender-based violence is prevalent 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). 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, Omidoyi and Odimegwu 2002:4). Nwanaju (2010:9), asserts that the problem persists because local laws have not yet been successfully updated to reflect international human rights treaties.

The Lagos State Government (LSG) (2011:5), highlighted that Nigeria has well-equipped policy framework to address problems relating to GBV. The nation has ratified several significant regional and international agreements. However, violence against women persists. One in three girls and women between the ages of 15 and 24 has suffered violence (Nwanaju 2010:12).

GBV confronts women daily in Nigeria in forms ranging from rape, sexual assault, brutality and victimization, and domestic violence against girls and women yet it is highly under-reported as many societies have built a culture of silence around the subject and in some cases, incidences are being seen as a norm. Victims for fear of stigmatization from family and friends do not report to appropriate authorities.

Many survivors who seek justice are accused, subjected to retaliation, or shunned by their families and communities, which drives them farther into destitution, loneliness, mental health issues and violent crime (World Health Organization 2020:6; UNICEF 2020:9; Perrin, Marsh, Clough, Desgroppe, Phaniel and Abdi 2019:23); thereby compounding the problem. This assertion is justified by a 2005 study by Amnesty International on Nigeria which states that family members frequently beat and mistreat women for alleged offences, rape them, and even kill them leaving many women disfigured.

Unfortunately, such violence is frequently justified, accepted, and not condemned in some communities. Fathers, partners, and husbands are primarily to blame for violence against women. However women are not left out. In a society where many women promote patriarchy and do not see the need to speak out and young girls are

raised to remain subservient in all circumstances, tackling GBV would require a holistic approach inclusive of all social categories.

Effects of Gender-based Violence

Gender based violence has adverse effects on human lives and ripple effects in the society, physical, sexual and psychological intimate partner violence can result to short- and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for women. They also affect their children's health and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2020). This violence leads to high social and economic costs for women, their families and societies; women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children. GBV can lead to fatal homicide and suicide, unintended pregnancies, induced abortions, gynaecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. These forms of violence can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress and other anxiety disorders, sleep difficulties, eating disorder. Children who grow up in families where there is violence may suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances. These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life (WHO, 2020).

Theories

Theories are useful in understanding social problems and proffering solutions. This paper discusses two social theories: social learning and Feminist theories; and how it is applicable to gender-based violence.

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).

Major Assumptions of SLT

1. Violence and threats are effective methods of obtaining what one wants;
2. one can choose to be the aggressor or the victim depending on the environment they grow up;
3. Victims are to be blame for violence;
4. when people inflict harm on others, they are not punished as it is considered a usual practice based on family socialization;
5. Anger or intoxication are triggers for violence, and those who are close to one can harm them as well;
6. Unhealthy, unfair relationships are typical or expected of children or adults who witnessed violent abuses while growing up.

Application of the Theory

In applying SLT to the study on gender-based violence on the basis of learning, it has been discovered that children who witness the conduct of abuse 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. Parents set examples for their children through their actions; they instruct their children 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.

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 theory 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

According to the feminist theory, 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 skepticism 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).

Feminism or fight for women liberation over time has been used 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). Basically, the argument of the theory is that, the fight against women liberation has led to increased women's abuses of the opposite sex. The theory links women's criminality and aggressive behaviors to the movement of women emancipation.

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 discussion. 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 against Gender-based Violence

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; Kishor and Johnson 2004:207). Recent studies conducted in the United States of America revealed that 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:

- Domestic Violence Prevention Law (2007)
- Child Rights Law (2007)
- Law protecting the rights of those who are disabled (2010)
- HIV/AIDS anti-discrimination legislation from 2007
- National Gender Policy (2006)
- 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:

1. Lack of data and information that is broken down by sex and gender;
2. Insufficient stakeholder consultations and communication;
3. Insufficient G&SI expertise and abilities.
4. 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

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 study adopted social learning and feminist theories as theoretical frameworks. The theories explicitly explain the menace of gender-based violence as a social concern that requires consistent effort towards mitigating it. Social and economic development cannot be attained if women and girls are continually threatened by gender-based violence. The fundamental rights, liberties, health, and welfare of people must be protected by the government and citizens violence against women is preventable. GBV can be discouraged by family members, friends, coworkers, employers, and the government through the following ways: socialization; to the Social Learning Theory postulates that behaviours are learned through the agents of socialization, gender-based violence is learned in the society. Therefore parents should teach their children the right cultural practice and 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. Also, individuals must challenge and abolish beliefs and cultural practices that reinforce aggression towards men and women.

The health sector has an important role to play to provide comprehensive health care to women subjected to various forms of violence, and also serve as an entry point for referring women to other support services they may need. Similarly, civil societies must educate the public on the dangers of cultural and religious practices that poses threats to both men and women in the society. This is in line with the argument of social learning theory (SLT) which emphasize on learning cultural behaviors. The government and enforce laws that have been instituted for this purpose and support initiatives that fight gender-based violence The legislative arms of the government must push for stronger laws that discourage gender-based violence in the society and give women opportunities to be seen and heard without discrimination.

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