

Original Research Article

The experience of violence against women and girls in Southwest, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Violence against women and girls is a universal malaise that involved all aspect of life irrespective of culture, status, religion, or age. Despite efforts in curbing the menace, women's rights are still threatened. This study aimed to assess the experience of violence against women and girls in southwest, Nigeria

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional design was used for this study. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interviewer-administered questionnaire and a key informant interview guide from 413 women/girls with age ≥ 18 years. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. P value < 0.05 was considered significant.

Results: Physical violence 338 (81.8%) was the most common type of violence known while emotional violence 57 (98.1%) was the most common violence experienced. The prevalence of violence against women and girls was 15.5%. The factors associated with violence against women and girls were age ($\chi^2=13.92$; $p=0.008$) and marital status ($\chi^2=67.62$; $p=0.001$). Some of the causes of violence against women and girls were the weakness of the women and misunderstanding between the couples while the solution to the menace were the education of the women, and appropriate punishment for the perpetrators which should be enforced.

Conclusions: Violence against women and girls is a malaise that can be curbed if appropriate measures are jointly taken by all and such imbedded into our culture.

Keywords: Experience, Factors, Nigeria, Violence against women and girls

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most pronounced manifestations of gender inequalities, is a universal malaise that encompasses physical, economic, psychological, sexual, and social echelons regardless of culture, status, religion, or age.¹ There are evidences of violence against women and girls in all countries and at all stages of development.²⁻⁴ Despite efforts by different

organizations to curb the violence against women and girls, women's rights are still threatened and sustained by certain socio-cultural practices.¹ Many studies attributed VAWG to patriarchy, which is considered to be a system of social, legal, political, religious, and economic arrangements designed to enhance male power and dominance on one hand and reinforce female subordination on the other hand.^{5,6} Regrettably, a taboo against discussion and the stigma of reporting domestic

violence limits the scope of knowledge about partner violence, which is generally believed to cut across socioeconomic and religious backgrounds.^{7,8}

Violence against women and girls is any public or private act of gender-based violence that can cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls which can include coercion, threatening or the deprivation of free will in households or community as a whole.⁹ It includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, early and forced marriage, trafficking, female genital mutilation and honor killings.¹⁰ The incidence of VAWG is underreported and as such it poses serious health and socio-economic consequences for family, society and country.⁹⁻¹¹ Violence against women and girls is not limited by race, location or intelligence as it affects women all over the world and it is a global human rights violation.¹²

Violence against women and girls remains a problematic reality to understand in the world today. Globally, more than 30% of women experienced different form of violence like physical or sexual violence, while 7% have experienced sexual assaults from non-partners.¹³ Up to 70 million under-age girls have been forcefully married globally.¹⁴ A study in South East, Nigeria reported an incidence of 70% of domestic violence with 92% of the victims being female.¹⁵ Domestic violence in Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate and over a quarter of the population of Nigerian women experienced domestic violence.¹⁶ A national victimization survey by the centre for law enforcement education (CLEEN) foundation reported an increasing trend in domestic violence from 21% in 2011 to 30% in 2013.¹⁷

About 140 million girls and women globally have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) and over 3 million are exposed to FGM annually in Africa.^{18,19} Despite the constitutional provision to banish torture and restore human dignity, female gender mutilation (FGM) is still a common violence present amid some ethnic groups in Nigeria. Victimization of gender-based violence or all types of violence was more prevalent among females than males, whereas perpetration was more prevalent among males than females.¹⁷ Violence against women and girls poses a serious health and socio-economic consequences for households and communities as a whole.^{9,11} There is paucity of data on violence against women and girls in southwest, Nigeria. This study therefore, aimed to assess the experience of violence against women and girls in southwest, Nigeria with the objectives of determining the incidence of VAWG, the factors associated with VAWG and outline the steps needed to tackle VAWG.

METHODS

This study was carried out in Ibadan, Oyo state located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, is the largest city in West Africa. The city is

mostly dominated by the Yoruba tribe and sparsely by the Igbos, Fulanis, and Hausas.²⁰ Ibadan covers a total area of 3,080 sqm which is up to 275 m above sea level. It has a population of over 6 million people and it is the third city with the highest population in Nigeria.²¹ Ibadan has a total of eleven local government areas of which five of them are urban, and the remaining are semi-urban and rural local government areas (LGAs).

A descriptive cross-sectional design was used for this study between July 10, 2020 and December 30, 2020. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interviewer-administered questionnaire and a key informant interview guide. Women and girls aged 18 years and above in Ibadan, Oyo State who provided consent were included in the study. While women who were below 18 years or ≥ 18 years but were not available or very ill were excluded from participating in this study.

The sample size for the quantitative study was determined using Leslie Fischer's formula for single proportions:

$$N = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{d^2}$$

Where N=number of study participants, Z=the standard normal distribution value at 95% Confidence Interval which is 1.96, P=the prevalence rate of violence among women and girls used was 42.3% from study in Nigeria.⁷ The margin of error at 0.05 was taken as d value. Utilizing the mentioned formula and taking the non respondent rate of (10%)=37.5 sample size was determined to be 412.5. Therefore, the sample size of the study was increased to approximately 413 respondents.

For the qualitative aspect of the study, a key informant interview was conducted on eight women across the four selected local governments. Two women each who are key stakeholders (community leaders) that supervise and manage cases of violence against women and girls were approached and interviewed across the four selected local governments. A multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select the 413 respondents from their households across the selected LGAs for the quantitative study in which a structured questionnaire was administered. A purposive sampling was used to select eight women to participate in a key informant interview for the qualitative data.

A pretested questionnaire was issued to women and girls across the four selected LGAs in Ibadan, Oyo State. The questions were organized into three sections (A-C). Section A asked questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. Section B revealed information about the violence against women and girls experienced by the study participants, and Section C asked questions related to the factors that contribute to violence against women and girls. Also, the in-depth interview guide was issued to the selected

community leaders across the LGAs in Ibadan to assess the violence against women and girls experienced by respondents; and the factors that contribute to violence against women and girls. The survey questionnaire and in-depth interview guide were pretested to ascertain if they meet the requirements of the study. Two enumerators who aided in the administration of the questionnaires and interview guides were trained to ensure the collection of reliable and quality data, and validity and reliability test was carried out. The reliability value and coefficient were obtained from this analysis to ascertain the statistical reliability of the survey design. The survey design was then cross-checked among the enumerators to ensure completeness and consistency of the information collected by subjecting it to a measure of internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient of 0.70 was recorded after the test which indicates a high internal consistency.

The data obtained from the questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 23. Descriptive and inferential statistics were done. Factors associated with experience of VAWG were done using Chi-square (χ^2). Results were considered to be significant at $p < 0.05$. Permission was obtained from the head of each community across the four selected LGAs. The purpose of the study and its significance was elaborated to each respondent and written informed consent was obtained from the respondents for the study. To guarantee non-disclosure of each participant's information, names, and other identifiers were excluded in the survey design. For other privacy reasons, respondents were interviewed one on one and separately. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information given and the data collected were entered and kept in a password protected computer.

RESULTS

Quantitative results

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in (Table 1). The ages of the majority (54.0%) of the respondents were between 18 and 29 years and the mean age is 29.9 (7.8) years. Most (52.3%) of the respondents had attained tertiary education. Majority (78.4%) of the women were married. The women were predominantly from households of 4-6 persons (62.5%) and the majority 143 (34.6%) of the women were traders. Most 262 (63.4%) were Christian.

More than three-quarters (81.8%) of the respondents were aware of physical violence against women and girls (able 2). Sixty-four (15.5%) of the respondents had experienced violence of one form or the other while 349 (84.5%) had not experienced violence of any form. Majority, (89.1%) had experienced emotional violence closely followed by psychological violence (79.7%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=413).

Variable	N	%
Age (years)		
18-29	223	54.0
30-39	156	37.8
≥40	34	8.2
Educational level		
Pre-tertiary education	197	47.7
Tertiary education	216	52.3
Marital status		
Single	77	18.6
Married	324	78.4
Divorced	9	2.3
Widowed	3	0.7
Household size		
1-3 persons	155	37.5
4-6 persons	258	62.5
Religion		
Christianity	262	63.4
Islam	151	36.6
Occupation		
Artisans	106	25.7
Traders	143	34.6
Civil Servants	75	18.2
None	89	21.5

Table 2: Knowledge on types of violence against women and girls among respondents.

*Types of violence against women and girls known	N	%
Physical violence	338	81.8
Sexual violence	256	61.9
Emotional violence	165	39.9
Psychological violence	82	19.9

*multiple responses

The partners' low income 45 (70.3%) and anger/hostility 40 (62.5%) were the most common causes of violence, while low academic achievement of the partner (14.1%) was the least cause of VAWG (Table 3). The study revealed that age ($\chi^2=13.92$; $p=0.008$) and marital status ($\chi^2=67.62$; $p=0.001$) had a statistically significant association with violence experienced among the respondents. It was also seen that violence was higher among the older age group 9 (26.5%), respondents with lower level of education 33 (16.7%), divorced/widowed 9 (75.0%), and the unemployed respondents 28 (31.4%) (Table 4).

Key informant interview results (qualitative analysis)

Some of the respondents revealed their opinions regarding violence against women and girls. Two out of three informants who responded on their experience against violence against women and girls revealed that

rape and sexual violence are rampant while contradictory opinions were given as regards human trafficking while the last informant reported that even though she had never faced any form of violence, she has listened to many victims talked about violence (Table 5).

Table 3: Violence experienced among respondents.

*Variables	Frequency N=64	%
Types of violence experienced		
Emotional violence	57	89.1
Psychological violence	51	79.7
Physical violence	50	78.1
Sexual violence	26	40.6
Causes of violence experienced		
Partners' low income	45	70.3
Anger and hostility	40	62.5
Partners' exposure to violence during childhood	22	34.4
Adherence to strict beliefs	19	29.7
Alcohol and drug abuse	16	25.0
Condoning violence in a relationship	13	20.3
Low academic achievement of the partner	9	14.1

*multiple responses

Some causes of VAWG suggested by the respondents were misunderstanding between the couples, weakness of

the women, and girls don't cover their nakedness these days which exposes their body, and thereby causing boys take advantage of this. This is seen in (Table 6).

Some of the recommended ways to reduce violence against women and girls is shown in (Table 7). The responses from the informants revealed that they want the Oyo State Government to ensure proper justice to be served to perpetrators of violence against women, and for women to be educated. Also, the victims of violence should be encouraged to share their experiences to enlighten other women.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed at determining the experience of violence against women and girls in southwest, Nigeria. The study revealed that majority of the respondents were young adults, this could be because the population of the selected local government were dominated by younger women. Similarly, the Nigeria population is dominated by the younger age group.²² Regarding the education level in the study, most (52.3%) of the respondents had attained tertiary education. This implies that education can be viewed as a vital aspect to address the global issue of violence against women and girls, thereby promoting gender equity. According to the international development agency in Sweden, higher education is a vital social and health determinant that increases the ability of a person to be employed and prepare for life actively as a citizen.²³

Table 4: Factors associated with violence experienced among respondents.

Variable	Experienced violence		χ^2 (P value)
	No (%)	Yes (%)	
Age (years)			
18-29	182 (81.6)	41 (18.4)	13.92 (0.008)
30-39	142 (91.0)	14 (9.0)	
40+	25 (73.5)	9 (26.5)	
Educational level			
Pre-tertiary education	164 (83.3)	33 (16.7)	0.34 (0.559)
Tertiary education	185 (85.6)	31 (14.4)	
Marital status			
Single	50 (64.9)	27 (35.1)	67.62 (0.001)
Married	296 (91.4)	28 (8.6)	
Divorced/widowed	3 (25.0)	9 (75.0)	
Occupation			
Artisans	81 (76.4)	25 (23.6)	6.39 (0.094)
Traders	125 (87.4)	18 (12.5)	
Civil servants	58 (77.3)	17 (22.7)	
None	61 (68.5)	28 (31.4)	

Regarding marital status, and religion, most of the respondents were married (79%), and Christian (63%) which was similar to the findings by Azeez et al who also

reported 70% of the respondents to be married and 59% of them were Christian.²⁴ The present study also showed that the women were predominantly from households of 4-6 persons (62.5%) and the majority (34.6%) were traders.

Table 5: Experience of violence against women and girls among respondents.

Themes	Illustrative statements
Opinion on violence against women and girls	“Well, violence can come in many ways. It can be sexual, physical or even emotional...”
	“Violence comes in different means such as domestic violence which happens in the home, psychological violence, female genital mutilation...”
	“Violence against women and girls can come in many forms, like using them as slaves, beating and so on... Physical, emotional, and most sexual violence. Human trafficking is also on-air, I hear it everywhere.”
	“Violence against women and girls can be in terms of raping, child abuse, recklessness over girls... Majorly rape, many of our girls are being raped, especially during hawking. Human trafficking and child abuse are also common.”
	“Violence against women is an attitude, emotional, psychological, sexual or domestic (which includes beating, or lowering someone’s self-esteem).”
How violence affects the health of women and girls	“When there is rape, there can be a tear of private part. The man that raped might not know if he has HIV or any other sexually transmitted disease. It may make the girl contract HIV or sexually transmitted disease.”
	“It causes pain and sorrow when those girls remember.”
	“It depends on the person affected. For girls, it affects their studies and how they interact with people. For women, it affects how they interact with people and affects them psychologically.”
Experience of violence against women and girls	“I have never encountered one, but I listen to people’s reactions and comments about it.”
	“Rape and human trafficking are popular.”
	“Rape, emotional and sexual violence are common, and human trafficking is less prominent.”

Table 6: Respondents’ opinions on the causes of violence against women and girls.

Themes	Illustrative statements
Common reasons why women and girls are abused.	“One: The community we find ourselves. Two: I think the physical appearance of a lady matters. I should say self-indiscipline on the part of men too because some of them are not disciplined...there are some women or ladies that lack speech manners or talk manners...women tend to speak a lot, and tend to say things they are not supposed to say. And this can lead to abuse, for men who cannot tolerate things.”
	“People think women are weak. They think women cannot do what men can do”
	“Misunderstanding between husband and wife can also cause it”
	“Girls don’t cover their nakedness these days. They expose their body, and boys take advantage of this. Also, poverty is a factor. A girl that is not well taken care of will respond to the approach of a man who wants to give her something and have sex with her.”
	“Sexual denial by the wife, or when the woman is pregnant.”
	“Low self-esteem contributes to it on the side of the woman. On the side of the abuser, ego and manipulation are one of the main reasons.”
	“For women, it arises from disagreements arising from the husband and wife. Some men are not patient enough with their wives. For girls, the clothes they put on, and the abusers also have a psychological problem or high on drugs.”

This result was not in line with the findings of Azeez et al who reported that the majority of the women interviewed for violence within Ibadan were civil servants.²⁴

The difference in the study could be due to the timing of the two studies. The study by Azeez et al was done in year 2016 while the present study was done in year 2020,

the four years interval could have caused loss of job in the civil service warranting change of occupation to trading.²⁴

Similarly, the year 2020 was the period of Corona virus-19 pandemic with is economic downfall resulting in loss of job in the civil services.

Table 7: Recommendation opinions on VAWG and COVID-19 prevention.

Themes	Illustrative Statements
Ways to mitigate the prevalence of violence against women & girls	“I think the Oyo State government should organize programs for such acts, and there should be severe punishments for men that harass women. It is because there is no punishment, that is, why men can think they can do whatever they like with their wives. They should send them to jail, or kill them instantly.”
	“There should be education for women, especially those in the rural area. There should be broadcast about violence and how to prevent it. The police and other officials should do their works properly.”
	“Anybody that is caught should be properly punished. For example, cutting of manhood can be a good judgement...”
	“On the side of the lady, she needs to build up her self-esteem, believe in herself, and come out of her shell. People should also learn to accept them the way they are.”
Roles of individuals in preventing violence against women and girls	“Those that have overcome should try to help people they see in such situations. If you think separation or divorce is the best, then let them know it is okay to get divorced so that it will not lead to another thing.”
	“Encouragement of the victims is key. Enlightenment and training of women can help too.”
	“If it is domestic violence, the victims need to get out of the toxic environment, and then build their self-esteem. The survivors need to forgive themselves and move on.”
	“Individuals should try to encourage people with low self-esteem, and correct erring people in love.”
	“Survivors can also share their experiences while individuals should take them seriously by listening to them and support them.”

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pronounced manifestations of gender inequalities, it demonstrates unequal power relationship between men and women causing men’s dominance and discriminatory act against women.²⁵ Sixty-four (15.5%) of the respondents in the present study had experienced violence of one form or the other. These results were not in line with the findings of World Health organization (WHO) and Bakare et al who reported a higher prevalence of 35% of violence against women and girls in Nigeria.^{13,26} The difference in the prevalence could be due to the underreporting of violence in the present study. The difference could also be because the WHO study involved data from every part of the country while the present study involved a geopolitical zone of the country.

The present study revealed that violence against women and girls was more among the older women than the younger women. This was contrary to study by Le Masson et al²⁷ where younger women experienced violence than older age group, this was also in concordance with result from WHO which stated that violence starts early in the lives of women.¹³ This study also showed that violence against women and girls was more prevalent among the divorced/widow. This finding was in line with the findings of Bakare et al who reported higher violence rate among the divorced.²⁶

The results from the study revealed that physical violence followed by sexual violence were the most common types of violence known to the respondents. Although, emotional violence followed by psychological violence were the most common types of violence experienced by

the respondents. This collaborates with the findings of Chandra-Mouli et al and United Nation.^{10,11} This showed that emotional violence and psychological violence are common violence experienced by women even though physical violence and sexual violence were commonly reported causing an increase awareness of physical and sexual awareness. The study also revealed that age, and marital status, were factors that were associated with violence against women and girls. This was similar to the finding by Chandra-Mouli et al.¹⁰

Some of the informants revealed their opinions regarding violence against women and girls. Their responses clearly showed that violence comes in different forms and violence of any form mostly affects the psychological well-being of women and girls which can affect the education of girls, and violence such as rape can cause Human immune-virus disease (HIV) or other sexually transmitted diseases to women. Kumar et al reported that violence against women and girls is a weighty problem that affects the psychological well-being of women and girls with several dire consequences on them.²⁸ According to the respondents of this study, violence against women and girls was also described as a human rights abuse. Informants’ response to the common reasons for violence against women and girls within their communities reveals how some men perceive women and they get treated based on that.

In mitigating the rising trend in the violence against women and girls, it was suggested in the present study that more intervention programs targeted at enlightening and supporting women and girls that have experienced

any form of violence should be developed and attention must be paid from the Ministry of Women Affairs within the Nigerian Government regarding violence against women and girls to protect women and girls from further complications as a result of violence. Also, the government must formulate better policies and laws centered on seeking justice for victims of violence to ensure proper punishment of perpetrators. Likewise, a database that documents reported cases of violence against women and girls must be kept by the government.

The study was limited by the fact that some respondents could have given a socially acceptable answer to some questions; similarly, the married women might underreport the violence experienced in order to keep their marriage. However, this study could be used as a guide in planning and implementing interventions aimed at reducing the rising incidence of violence against women and girls in the study location.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, any form of violence mostly affects women and girls psychologically. Emotional violence and psychological violence were the most dominant forms of violence against women and girls in the study area in which age and marital status were key variables as more women who were divorced/widow faced more violence than the married. The low level of reported cases of violence particularly among married women reveals more married women underreporting the case of violence experienced.

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