



An Overview of Confidentiality in Context of Violence Against Nigerian Women and Girl Children: Implications for Girl-Child Education

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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed the Confidentiality in Context of Violence against Nigerian Women and Girl Children. Causes and effects of violence against women and girls, Cases of Gender-based violence, why violence against women and girls are not reported and Confidentiality involved in treating cases of such violence were reviewed. The Educational implication is that there will be high level of female dropout in Education, high level of illiteracy among women and girls and consequently tell on the general development of Nigeria as a nation.

Keywords: Confidentiality, Violence, Women and Girl-child and Educational Implication.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girl children is a very sensitive issue that impinges on women's human right, yet grossly neglected in a way that encourages criminal act to continue in all human societies. When a women or a girl is violated, especially in sex related issues, normally such a case is quickly buried, regardless of how the victim feels. The usual reason given is that the damage will cost the victim and her family if the issues are made public. By implication, if reported, it will be known to all. So, the best is not to report it, as no confidentiality will be ensured.

The general view that cases of violence against women and girls are not reported borders on the damage such a case could cause to the social values and family status of the victim. When such issues are reported, it goes viral. So, the best is not to report at it all. According to Whiting (2019), perpetrators, communities and even victims get caught in the webs of deceit and confusion that encourage people to hide causes of sexual violence. It remains hidden in most societies due to factors like combination of

denial, manipulation and confusion such issues bring to human society. Whiting further categorized reasons for hiding such occurrences as follows;

- The Myth of Evil – perpetrator
- Wishing the world was safe
- Wrong kind of victim
- Confusion of self-blame
- What can we do?

When the perpetrators have influences on the society and cannot be openly accused by the community they live, the case is normally placed under the carpet at the expense of the victim's psychological feelings. This attitude is typical to customs, values and taboos of the society. According to Whiting, emphasis are only considered based on confirmation on the rightness of the case and the character of the victim to accept self-blame.

The general view is that most cases of violence against women and girls are hidden for reasons that confidentiality cannot be ensured. In the context of violence against women and girls, the general understanding of the role of confidentiality is that there is no guarantee that the issue once reported will remain confidential.

Confidentiality is a professional ethical principle that guides code of conduct in guidance and counseling services. It is a deliberate step taken by members to safe guard professional activities of counsellors in discharging their duties to their clients (EYO and Esua-bana 2018). It is an ethical principle code that is justifiable in guidance and counselling.

American Counsellor Association (ACA 2014), see confidentiality as aiming at setting ethical practice of professional counselors, a ground of moderating members' activities with expectation of acceptable conducts. It a professional norm that ensure both the counsellors' and clients' psychological privacy as regard to shared information. It is one of the principle ethics that ensure confidence in the client, knowing that secrets revealed in the course of interaction with counselor is under key and lock.

In case of treating social menace like violence against women and girls, which impinges on the women dignity and personality, it is expected that confidentiality is truly ensured, if such daily crimes should be stopped. The question that needs an answer is that: is confidentiality truly ensured in cases of violence against women and girls in Nigeria?

The main purpose of this paper is to review the confidentiality of reported cases of violence against women and girls and the implication for Girl Child Education.

Specifically, the following will be overviewed:-

- Concept of violence against women and girls
- Cause/justification of violence against women and girls
- Effects of violence against women and girls
- Reporting and treating of cases of violence against women and girls
- Confidentiality of reported cases
- Implication for Girl Child Education

CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NIGERIA

Violence involves power and control. It is unlawful use of force by one against another. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in 1993, while adopting the declaration on the elimination of violence against women, defined violence that are gender based as any "act that result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering mated out on women." These include threats of acts such as cohesion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether, occurring in; public or private life. So, any form of force used against women; be it physical or psychological assault is violence against women.

Gender-based violence is seen as a crime that threatens the well being of individual, families and the community at large. It comprises of rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and assault, forced and early child marriage, battery, trafficking and commercialization of women body and female genital mutilation and social exclusion (UNA, 1993).

Rape is the most brutal and evil gender-based form of violence that could be committed against women or girls. It is forceful sexual relationship with a woman against her consent, with her consent but obtained under fear of hurt or death, deception, with or without her consent when the victim is under aged i.e., 14 years section 282 (1) of the penal code. Woman or girl could be raped by husband, boyfriend, relation, neighbours or unknown person or people. (UNA, Q993). Rape is a common evil activity that occurs on a daily basis in most Nigeria society at all levels in rural and urban communities.

Force marriage is gender-based violence when the women or girl-children are forced to marry a man that is not of her choice. In case of child marriage, apart from not being her choice, she is also not matured enough to get married. In most of Nigerian communities, especially in educational deprived areas, women and girls are married against their wishes.

Trafficking and commercialization of women: it is another type of violence against women and girls that is very common in Nigeria. It is when women are taken to other places in guise of looking for work but are forced into prostitution. Most of the poverty stricken community see girl child trafficking as a way out of poverty.

Female Genital Mutilation: known as female circumcision is another type of violence against women and girls. Though, this is not practiced in all Nigerian communities, a good number of community practice it. This act causes great stress on the women fold.

Women and girl-children violence are committed at three levels; within home, community and at the state level.

Violence against women at home: is the type that is very common. It is also known as domestic violence. It comprises of battery, sexual abuse, assault, female genital mutilation, marital rape, dowry related violence, incest and all other traditionally related violence.

Violence against women at the Community level: here also, we have violence like rape, battery, sexual assault, sexual harassment and intimidations in school, markets, work and farms, forced treatment and abusive medication, commercialization of women, abortion, etc.

Violence against women at the State levels: at the state level, violence against women is being perpetrated as physical, sexual assault and psychological violence, which are tolerated, by state that prioritizes custom or traditions above the fundamental women human rights.

CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There could be many reasons why violence are meted out on women and girl-children. Causes could vary based on types of violence. Generally, the following are forwarded as the reasons for violence against women.

- i. Traditional attitude towards women that placed them as second class citizens and subordinates.
- ii. Poverty level: where people live and how needs are not met could allow for violence.
- iii. Religious misconception/misinterpretation. It occurs in cases when cultural cre-cross religious belief and concept related to sex and relation are interpreted or misconceived.

EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON WOMEN, GIRLS AND SOCIETY

How society does sees and react to the victims?

Effects of violence against women and girl-children could be devastating as it could last for life on the memory of the victim. Generally, when a victim is abused, by implication, individual (victim) family, community and the state at large is being affected. There are many effects of violence against women among which are the following:

- Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, confusion, feeling of stigmatization
- Fear of perpetrator
- Rejection
- Psychological damage of victim
- Intellectual damage of victim
- Social and moral damage of victim

- Self-blame

When woman or girl-child is abused in any form, it affects her person, development and productivity. This usually happens when the individual is so devastated and cannot overcome the relationship experienced as result of the violence.

HOW GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ARE RECEIVED AND TREATED AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

In order to discuss effectively, how society received and reported cases of violence, the following questions are worth noting:

- Are all cases of violence against women and girls reported to the appropriate bodies?
- Those reported, how were they treated?
- Why are some not reported?
- Should cases of violence against women be reported?

There are many reasons that victims of violence, especially of rape cases or other sex related violence are never reported, nor do victims seek for redress from the home, community or the state, they include:

- Fear of blame and rejection by the family
- Stigma attached to the victim of such cases
- Difficulties attached or faced in obtaining conviction
- Difficulties in identifying the criminal in case of where the victim does not know the offender.
- When a victim is known to be of bad behavior (prostitute)
- Publicity given to the crime, which relates to confidentiality or betrayal of trust.

When victims come and report a case of violence committed against them, many things are taken into consideration. First, we know that the victims are hurt and think there is someone that could be of help and that is the person to whom the case is reported to. The victims by implication have confidence in the person to whom such a case is reported to. But what really happen? Within no time, the reported issues become public news.

Confidentiality in context of violence against women and girls has to do with firm belief or trust. It has to do with an assurance that the person to whom a trust of secret is given, will not expose the secret to others. Confidentiality is the ability of the one to whom secret or trust of private affairs of another is given, and is kept secret. When tragic issues like violence against women and girls occurred, it is expected that law enforcement agencies stake holders or village heads treat it with respect to confidentiality, unfortunately in most communities in Nigeria, they all judge the victims as guilty thus, jeopardizing the life of the victim. No wonder many of the cases are not reported, this is because the victims from experience of what happened to others cannot trust anybody with their private secrets. The option then is for the victim to suffer in silence.

Another reason why victims may not want to confide in law enforcement agencies or any other group is mostly due to filtered report on how previous victims were handled. Also common statements by law enforcement agencies and stake holders like;

- 'What the victim wearing at the time of the offence?'
- 'What is the relationship between the victim and the offender?'
- 'Where and when and why was the victim there at that time?'

All these questions are asked at family, community and stakeholder and they blame the victim for the assault, and so scare them from reporting cases. The question is, is there any justification in violence against women and girl-child regardless of relationship, nature of dress being used by the victim or place and time of crime? Have women and girls no right to how and when to live their life?

Confidentiality is very important to a victim of violence. Those that handle such cases should bear in mind that the victim has come to you in trust that you will help without exposing them. The fact is when such issues are reported, it soon become public news and here the victim is humiliated and exposed, that people come around to see and mock her. Here confidence or trust is betrayed and victims' pain is made worse. The general overview is that in Nigerian communities whether the case is reported to law

enforcement agency, stake holders, like families and village or ward heads never give regard to privacy of the victim and this affects reporting the art of violence against women and girls.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

Education is the best legacy a nation can give to her citizen, especially youths. This is because education is very important in the development of a nation or community. It is fundamental to development and growth. It is a powerful driver to development and is one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equality, peace and stability. Education has large consistent returns in terms of income and counter widening inequality (The World Bank Groups, 2016). Education is an important foundation to improve the status of girls and by extension every human being. It is also recognized as fundamental strategy for human development. This explains why it is said that no sustainable development can be achieved if girls or women remain uneducated individuals, but if you educate a girl, you educate a nation.

Women education empowerment is the single most effective way to improve the lives of families as well as economic development to all communities of the world (Peters & Imeh 2019). However, there is decline in education among girls or women due to social evils associated with gender based violence. A girl that has been physically, psychologically or sexually abused, may likely have to struggle with poor academic achievement in the now or future and also development of unwanted behaviour, to include feeling of guiltiness, aggressiveness, inferiority complex, maladjustment and unforgiveness. These have been found to have significant influence on the interaction of the girl's educational pursuit. Another decline in education of girls or women associated with gender based violence is unwanted pregnancy which deters their education. The shame associated with child bearing and molestation made them less in terms of social behaviour rating which led to their dropout in school.

How to stop or minimize violence against women and girl-child ensuring confidentiality in process of reporting and treatment of cases is important. Violence against women and girls is a global evil. Many nations of the world have come to the realization of the evil nature of this offence, (violence against women and girls) and have come out in many ways to stop the evil. The stopping of this evil is not something that can be done in a day, but the important thing is to realize that it is bad, it must be stopped. The Educational implication of violence against Women and Girl is that there is going to be high level of female dropout where this evil is rampant, women will not be educated.

SUGGESTED WAYS FOR STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ensuring confidentiality in cases of reported violence against women and girls is very important and if properly done, incidences of violence will be reduced drastically.

First, there is need for proper understanding of criminality of violence against women and girls no matter the reasons of the perpetrators for involving in such an act. This implies that teaching, seminars, workshop and grass root enlightenment should be carried on this concept. This will help in directing mindset of the community as to the evil of such act regardless of the motive behind the act.

There is need of training programme for all groups that such cases must be reported and treated. Stakeholders should be taught the concept of confidentiality and how and why to ensure it in the cases of violence against women. Here then, there will be enlightenment at family, community and state levels.

Enlightenment at different levels will involve:

- Involvement of different media
- Enforcement of law to related violence at different levels- family, community and state levels.

In the course of fighting against gender-based violence, there should be understanding of the basic legal concepts such as justice, authority, freedom, privacy, equality, honesty, and fairness and above all, confidentiality.

CONCLUSION

If one would not help in stopping violence against women and girls, because it is wrong, then one has to stop it because of the fact that every woman or girl could be wife, mother, sister or cousin of someone. Another reason why all must see that this evil is stopped is because of what a woman stands for at home, community, society and the nation. The woman is a companion of the man, she is the minister of education, home affairs, health, labour and productivity of the house/home. She is the power behind the success in the home. It is the home that makes up the community, society and the Nation at large. The women and the girl-child are the roots that support the nation. Every nation that needs good homes must take care of the women and secure them from all forms of violence by stopping such acts and ensure confidentiality in treating gender based cases.

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