

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread issue that impacts families, communities everywhere. Gender-based violence can be prevented in large part through the cooperation of the government, community and family. This paper examined gender-based violence under the following: concept of gender-based violence, scope of gender-based violence, resultant effect of gender-based violence and the way forward.

Keywords: Gender, Gender-based Violence (GBV), Inequality, Human right.

Introduction

Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender. Gender-based violence is based on an imbalance of power and is carried out with the intention to humiliate and make a person or group of persons feel inferior. This type of violence is rooted in the social and cultural structure, norms, and values that govern a society, and is often perpetuated by a culture of denial and silence (Klopfstein and Hofner (2013).

Gender based violence in most cultures can happen in both the private and public spheres and it mostly affects women.

Women are discriminated against in most matters, including access to formal education, right to family inheritance, access to positions of leadership, authority, and power in public life, among many others. They are generally mistreated and perpetually kept as house help. The average Nigeria woman is seen as an object of sexual gratiation for the man and without right to choice in marriage. She is generally regarded as a tool for economic growth of the family, which explains her role in the family and the community as a farm hand and a shop or market attendant, including street hawking. This subservient status of women in the society has created in the average woman an inferiority complex which has in turn rendered her susceptible to all kinds of abuse, including gender-based violence (GBV). This is the situation that has given rise to this paper which aims to examine the concept, scope, and effects of GBV and to proffer recommendations for its prevention.

Concept of Gender-based Violence

Gender is simply the qualities or attributes of men and boys on the one hand as opposed to those of women and girls on the other, and these qualities or attributes are socially constructed. These qualities cover interpersonal connections as well as the standards, mannerisms, and roles that come with being a male (man or boy) or female (woman or girl). It must be pointed out here that these male and female attributes differ from one cultural group to another. This fact demonstrates the point often made in the literature that gender is a socially and culturally constructed concept. Alamveabee in Allana (2013) points out for instance that the gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household are socially, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences. The International Organization for Migration (2015:12) on its part states that gender refers to the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to people based on their assigned sex. This means that gender is rational and refers not simply to women, men or other groups, but to the relationship between them. Although notions of gender are deeply rooted in every culture, they are also changeable over time and have a wide variation both within and between cultures. The point made by the IOM that gender roles as social constructs evolve over time has also been

made by Zandt and Maquestiau (2019) who have mentioned among their four characteristics of gender, the characteristic that gender roles “evolve in time, space, cultures”. The above views of gender represent the widely held concept of gender which helps to better conceptualise gender-based violence.

Gender-based-violence is a turbulent state resulting in destruction or aggression against one another. Gender-based violence is a human right violation and is the result of structural, deep-rooted discrimination, which requires legislative, administrative and instrumental measures and reforms, including the eradication of gender stereotypes. Nwadinobi and Umezulike (2019) define gender-based violence as a conscious effort to inflict harm on a person or people because of their gender. Ott (2021) opines that gender-based violence (GBV) includes physical, verbal, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse, threats, coercion and economic or educational deprivation. Gender-based violence includes any kind of violence directed against people due to the gender or gender identification. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, 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 in private life.

Scope of Gender-based Violence

The scope of GBV is applied to instances where gender is the basis of violence carried out against a person. However, there is more to gender than being just male or female, Akumu, Isabella and Otim (2005). Opine that some may be born with female sexual characteristics but identify as male or as male and female at the same time, or sometimes as neither male nor female. LGBT+ people (Lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender and other people who do not fit the heterosexual norm or traditional gender binary categories) also suffer from violence which is based on their factual or perceived sexual orientation, or gender identity. For that reason, violence against such people fall within the scope of gender-based violence. Furthermore, men can also be targeted with gender based violence. Statistically, the number of such cases is much smaller, in comparison with women. Women are vulnerable when it comes to gender-based violence. It can be sexual, physical, verbal, psychological (emotional) or socio-economic and it can take many forms, from verbal violence and hate speech on the internet, to rape or murder (WHO (2003). It can be perpetuated by anyone – a current or former spouse/partner, a family member, a colleague at work, schoolmates, friends, an unknown person, or people, or who act on behalf of cultural, religious, state or intra-state institutions. World Health Organization (2019) asserts that gender-based violence, as with any type of violence, is an issue involving relations of power. It is based on the feeling of superiority and an intention to assert that superiority in the family, at school, at work, in the community or in the society as a whole.

Gender-based violence and violence against women are two terms that are often used interchangeably, as most violence against women is inflicted by men for gender-based reasons, and gender-based violence affects women disproportionately. It is commonly known that the majority of gender based violence is committed against women and girls by men. The “gender -based” component is crucial though, because it draws attention to the fact that many types of violence against women have their root in power disparities between men and women. Oyediran and Feyisetan (2017) as well as Jewkes and Dartnall (2011) opine that gender-based act of violence against women include coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, threats of such acts, and that these acts cause or are likely to cause physical, sexual psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women. These acts can either take place in public or private settings.

Effect of Gender-based Violence

Violence and abuse affects not just the women involved but also their children, families, and communities. These effects include harm to an individual’s health, possible long term harm to children, and harm to the communities such as loss of work and homelessness. Above all, long term cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes can occur, including insomnia, phobia, aggression, low self-esteem, and impaired problem solving skills. Allanana (2013) asserts that gender-based violence limits women as human beings, drains their energy and hope, and constricts the possibilities of creating a new vision of society. Laura (2016) affirms that gender based-violence has a harmful impact on reproductive health. Among the adverse outcomes of gender-based violence are teenage child bearing for incest victims, rapid repeated pregnancies

during adolescence for sexually and physically abused teenagers, abortion, and sexually transmitted infection for college female students with abusive partners.

Around the world, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or maltreated into some other approach most frequently by someone she knows, including by her spouse or another male relative, one woman in four has been ill treated during pregnancy (Angeles 2012). Violence against women naturally violates and impairs or nullifies the gratification by women of their human rights and elementary freedoms. In all societies, to a larger or lesser extent, women and girls are subjected to corporal, sexual, and mental violence and this cuts across ranks of earnings, class and customs. (Gage and Thomas 2017). This is a subject which endangers women's lives, bodies, mental uprightness and autonomy. McClosky (2016) surmised that violence has reflective effects both directly and indirectly on a woman's reproductive health, including unnecessary pregnancies and limited admittance to family planning information and contraceptives, treacherous abortion or injuries remitting throughout a lawful abortion subsequent to an unwanted pregnancy, complications from recurrent, high-risk pregnancies and lack of follow-up care, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, continual gynaecological problems as well as mental tribulations.

The way forward

Gender-based violence continues to be a major human right issue around the world. No country, including those that boast of the highest levels of gender equality, has fully educated its citizens on gender-based violence. Regardless of class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability status, or culture, gender-based violence affects one out of every three women and girls; and yet, that need not be the case. Everyday, millions of people, groups, and organizations work to bring about change at the family, community and national levels. These changes could include possible prevention strategies to gender-based violence. Some of these GBV prevention strategies include the following:

- Awareness: Women need to know their rights, how to avoid violence-prone situations, how to report violence, and how to reject harmful gender norms.
- Belief and Support of Survivors: One of the biggest barriers to ending gender-based violence today is that survivors are often not believed when they speak up. There is need to believe the survivors and help them.
- Engagement of men as allies and partners: Women need to be supported and empowered; however any solution to gender-based violence that does not involve and engage men and boys may only have an initial success before it is undermined.
- Keep girls in school: Speaking of keeping girls in school, child marriage and related forms of gendered violence may prevent girls from finishing their education. We know from data that girls who are missing out on education are more susceptible to violence, especially at home.
- Treat gender-based violence as a public health issue: Women should be encouraged to feel safe confiding in a health care professional if they are experiencing violence at the hand of a family member or intimate partner.
- Including women in decision-making at leadership level
- Empowering women economically to strengthen the self-esteem and financial independence of those sections of the population which are more likely to be at risk of violence.
- Training professionals to be able to identify, address and respond to cases of gender-based violence. This might include providing training for teachers, youth workers, social workers, trainers, healthcare provider, etc.
- Providing accessible information about what gender-based violence is, about the different forms, possible remedies and existing support measures. This might include producing leaflets or websites, working on social media campaigns, creating TV spots, or making information available in youth centres and schools.

- The paper suggests the deliberate, consistent and systematic approaches to combating all forms of gender-based issues.

Conclusion

In all societies, women and girls have less power than men over their bodies, decisions and resources. Social norms that condone men's use of violence as a form of discipline and control reinforce gender inequality and perpetuate gender-based violence. However there are also challenges associated with gender-based violence which are poverty, conflict and war, displaced women and refugees etc. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure the success of this initiative for safety of our women and girls. This paper submits that gender-based violence is a serious threat that can have significant long-term effects on individuals and communities. Hence addressing gender-based violence requires collective efforts from individuals, communities, the civil society, organizations, and government agencies to create a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

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