

# Gender Based Violence, A Glaring Pandemic in Nigerian Universities

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## Abstract

The study investigated gender based violence among students in Nigerian universities, particularly females. The study also examined the meaning of university, sexuality, sexual behavior, the concept of violence and gender based violence. The study revealed that sexual violence, physical violence, sexual harassment, emotional/psychological violence and intimate partner's violence are the forms of gender based violence experienced by students in Nigerian universities. It was also found that age of students, university social environment, problem of accommodation, university culture, parents' financial strength, lack of contemptment on the part of the student, student Sexual behavior and their mode of dressing, cultist activities, under reported cases of GBV, lack of adequate security and provision of essential amenities in the universities are the factors that influenced the gender -based violence experienced. Based on the findings it was recommended that the university authorities need to strengthen the university counselling center and others that are concerned to always organize proper orientation for students regularly especially the new students and furnish them with information about the university structure and the culture of the university in order not to fall prey. Government and university authorities need to resolve and find lasting solution to the problem of accommodation faced by the students and that accommodation should be made available for the newly admitted students that seems to be target of the perpetrators and so on.

**Keywords:** Gender, Violence, University, Females, Nigeria, Harassment, Forms,

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## Background to the Study

A University could be described as a high-level or tertiary educational institution in which students study for degrees and where academic research are done. Universities awards academic degrees in various academic disciplines and typically offers and award undergraduate and graduate, masters and Ph.D. degrees. (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse>). A university is a combination of organizational structures with key authorities. The University social environment is a liberal one that accommodates permissive behaviours of all sorts as opined by (Olusegun, 2012). There is total freedom for all students to exhibit willful acts as desired by all and sundry and that appears to have been abused. This has given license to most of the students, especially the indiscipline and the corrupt to behave the way they like and do what pleases them even if it will hurt others, not minding the consequence. University students are rated as adults who are supposed to behaved responsively, decently and cultivate good habit worth of emulation and promote peaceful atmosphere in the university. It is expected of this category of people to know the right things to do even if they were not monitored. Unfortunately, it has not be so and these seems to be influencing and thus increasing the vulnerability of gender-based violence among Nigerian University students. The researcher also observed that the permissive behaviour allowed University students seems to have been violated as students were given free will attitudes to embark on any social activity such as organizing parties at will within the school campus without being monitored or quarried as stressed by Goetz, (2010). Students attend social function, night clubs and night parties where alcohol is consumed freely that usually accompanied irrational behaviours which can enhance violence acts because both sexes could be intoxicated or unconscious of what is happening. Formed different gangs and harmful groups and become terror to other students on campus. It should be noted that Nigeria is a gendered society where socio-cultural norms that governs attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, practices and expectations results in gender inequality coupled with pertinaciously, restrictive gender norms manifest itself in high levels of gender-based violence as a result of the debilitate social structure in Nigeria.

Sexuality is the tendencies and behaviour of human being with regards to any activity that causes association with sexual arousal, it is strongly influenced by the genetically inherited sexual response pattern that ensures reproduction. (Olusegun, 2012). Sexual behaviour is an integral part of the personality of every human being, they are all visible actions of human based on interactions that has to do with sexual activities and its full development depends upon the satisfaction of basic human needs such as desire for contact, intimacy, emotional, expression, pleasure and love. Allyn (2000), opined that sexual behaviour exhibited by human beings can either be normal or abnormal. The pleasure component of sexuality is the major reinforcement for abnormal sexual behaviour. It seems as if Nigerians are fast absorbing foreign cultures, neglecting the traditional principles of normal sexual acts. Bandura (2009), in his findings, about sexual behaviour of students in the university in Nigeria revealed that university students are far deviating from normal sexual behaviour dictated by our culture. University campuses are fast becoming awful place for students particularly females due to the prevalence violations and acts of violence that is increasing on daily bases among students which culminates the prevalence of gender-based violence. Gender-based violence disproportionately affects females. A growing body of literature has shown that gender-based violence is not limited to females alone as males are also victims. An example is a study by

Struckman-Johnson (1988), who found that USA University males have been subjected to GBV strategy by females. Although this paper focused on female victims.

### Concept of Violence

Violence denote exertion of power, physical force over the recipient in order to satisfy one's negative or selfish desire not minding the consequence over the victim. It could lead to forceful and emotional abuse that could harm, a t times it could result to pain, fear, injury, killing and so on. According to Smihula & Daniel (2013), violence is when a person attacks someone else, often to get them do something they do not want to do. As stressed by <https://www.sribd.com/presentation/158547850/violence>, violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal- development, or deprivation. Violence is a threat to the health of male and females. Violence often has lifelong consequences for a range of physical, sexual, reproductive, mental health, social functioning of individuals. Violence can be divided into three broad categories, such a self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence. Violence could be counted among the major causes of death of people ranging from 15-45years worldwide, male and female inclusive. It is an inevitable part of human conditions. (Ndagunnu, 2008). Violence pervades the lives of many people around the world, and touches every individual in one way or the other. No country is void of violence, it is a universal scourge that that tears at the fabric of communities and threatens people's life, well-being and happiness. Each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives to violence. In Africa, out of every 100,000 people, each year an estimated 60.9 die a violent death. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence>).

### Concept of Gender –Based Violence

Gender based violence (GVB) which could also be referred to as gender violence, or sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) could be defined as any harmful act that is perpetrated or done against a person. Gender based violence is the manifestation of the historical unequal power relations and imbalance in the use of power between men and women that has led to domination and discrimination against females because men are usually the victims. The term gender based violence served to maintain structural gender inequality as against all categories of females, it denotes forceful acts of behavior against human gender that which is used to denote harm inflicted upon individual groups that are connected to the normative understanding of their gender. GBV is a major public health issue because of its acute and chronic impact in the victim's health A notable human rights violation within all societies that involves physical, sexual and psychological abuse from intimate partners and non- partners. Gender based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between male and female due to gender norms and stereotypes. (Sylvia, Waliby, Jude, Towers, Brian, 2014). The causes are multidimensional which include social, economic, cultural, political and religious factors.

### Forms of Gender-Based Violence Among Students in Nigeria Universities

Gender-based violence manifesting among university students could be categorized into 5 sub-headings namely:-

- i. Sexual Violence

- ii. Physical violence
- iii. Sexual Harassment
- iv. Emotional /Psychological violence
- v. Intimate Partner's Violence.

**Sexual violence-:** It could be described as a purposeful act of an attempt to obtain sexual acts by violence, force and coercion against a person irrespective of the relationship with the victim under duress, detention form of abuse of power. (WHO, 2002). Examples are, rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, force relationship and the likes.

**Physical violence-:** It is any intentionally sexual acts and behaviour causing injury, trauma and other physical suffering or bodily harm to another person through bodily contact. Such includes- torture, punching, biting, battered, assault, violence, hazing, slapping, twisting of arms, legs and coverings of mouth violently, tripping naked, mutilating genitals, denial of rights. In nine studies investigated, the prevalence of lifetime physical violence found ranged from 7-4 to 66.1 percent. The analysis includes a total of 7888 participants and 1480 cases of lifetime physical violence. (Mckle, & Robi ,2012).

**Emotional and Psychological Violence-:** They are emotional abuse rather than physical in nature. (Tomison, Adam, Tucci & Joe1997). It encompasses verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle shameful acts and psychological effects. These are forms of abuse that exposed or subject the victim to a behaviour that could result to shame, rejection, stigmatization, isolation, fear, anxiety, depression, discrimination, withdrawn that could affect the victims personality, threatening physical harm to self and probably the perpetrator. Self-worth, self –concept, all sorts of unpredictable behaviours and the total well-being of the person in question.

**Sexual Harassment-:** Sexual harassment is a sexual behaviour that is annoying, that humiliates or worries somebody by putting pressure or embarking on unpleasant and unwanted sexual advances. It is a persistent unwanted sexual conduct based on sex or gender that creates hostile and intimidating environment which encompassed verbal and non-verbal conduct. Farleys and Lin (1978) stressed that it is a pattern of sexual behaviour that can induce fear of harm or impairs the dignity of a person. According to Eliot, Avery, Fisherman, & Hoshiko, (2002). Sexual harassment is a type of harassment that involves the act of implicit and explicit sexual overtones with unwelcome promises of rewards in exchange for sexual favour. Bakar and Carrie (2018) affirmed that sexual harassment includes a range of actions from verbal transgressions to sexual assaults, a common and most promiscuous GBV occurring among students.

Forms of sexual Harassment manifesting among students in Nigeria University Campuses could be noticed in two ways-ether through verbal harassment or non-verbal harassment.

#### i. Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment is an act of physical torment to coerce another person into an unwanted sexual acts. As opined by Houghton M.H (2018), verbal abuse is referred to as verbal assault, it is the act of forcefully criticizing, insulting, or denouncing another person. Verbal harassment could be noticed in calling an adult as a girl, babe, or honey, by whistling at

someone, making sexual comments about a person's body, turning lecture time to sexual discussion, telling 'unwelcome sexual jokes' or story, asking about someone's sexuality, fantasies, preferences, or history, asking personal questions about social or sexual life, making kissing sounds, making sexual comments about a person's clothing, anatomy, or looks, repeatedly asking out a person who is not interested, telling lies or spreading rumors about a person's personal sex life.

#### ii. Non - verbal sexual harassment.

Looking a person up and down (Elevator eyes), Staring at someone, blocking a person's path, Following the person, giving personal gift, displaying sexually suggestive visuals, making sexual gestures with hands or through body movements, making facial expression such as winking, blowing kisses or licking lips.

#### iii. Physical Sexual harassment.

Giving a massage around the neck or shoulders, touching the person's clothing, hair or body, hugging and kissing, touching or rubbing oneself sexually around another person, standing close or brushing up against another person, homosexuality, pecking of cheeks, embracing, caressing, threat of physical harm and so on.

#### The Campus Sexual Harassers

i. Students, Staffs, Course lecturers/Students, Students/Course Lecturers, Project Supervisors/Supervisors, administrative Staff/Students.

**Intimate partners Violence:** It is a form of sexual violence that occurs between, a current or former sexual partner in an intimate relationship against the victim. (Marshall & Linda, 1992). IPA could occur in different forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, economical, and sexual abuse. World Health Organization define IPU as any sexual behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychology or sexual harm to those in relationship, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner.

## Factors Favouring Gender Based Violence among students in Nigeria Universities

### Age of students:-

Majority of students gaining admission into University these days are too young compare with what it used to be in the past. They are not matured enough to face the complexity of university environment. Based on this, they are easily deceived by the older students, particularly into the acts of unwanted sexual activity. Before they understand what is going on, they are already into it. Some of them, gaining admission into the university was their first outing under the shield of their parent. One can just imagine the case that was brought to one of the university counsellors of recent. On one faithful day, a hundred level student was in the class studying, one three hundred male level student saw her where she was, her third week on campus. The older student moved closer and tend to make himself familiar, admiring her seriousness, not known to her that he was just playing upon her intelligence. He collected her phone number, calling her on regular basis. One faithful day he just called the girl to join him in the class so that he can check her lecture notes and assist where necessary. When the girl was ready to go back to her resident, he discourages her and promise her that he will lead her to her place. When he noticed that no student was around, he just bounces on the girl right inside the lecture room and raped her, the girl shouted nobody was around to save her. The girl said, it was as if she was dreaming and since that

day, he never set her eyes on the boy. Unfortunately for her, she got pregnant, that was her first experience, and she did not know what to do. He was led to the counsellor by one of her course mates who persuaded her not to kill herself. There are many students facing this kind of challenge, and it thus give room for GBV.

#### **University Social environment-:**

University social environment is so liberal with permissive behaviour, nobody monitors anyone. It was believed that a university undergraduate should be able to take care of themselves and behaved responsibly. Student are free to do whatever they wishes to do. This permissive acts had given license to some student to behave irrationally because the liberal acts appear to have been abused. Some students will have organized party during lectures hours, some used to go to night parties both within and outside the university campus. At times the unserious among the students will organize night party where alcoholic will be consumed inviting other student in an attempt to get them molested.

#### **Another issue is the problem of accommodation in Nigeria Universities-:**

Only few Universities have good accommodation, even some were non -residential. This problem of accommodation had exposed many students to violence acts because most of the places secure as residents lacks adequate security and proper monitoring either by the university authorities or land lords. More so, this seems to be encouraging co- habitation by male and female students that were not legally married living together as husband and wives in this kind of situation, the in matured boy may tend to claim manhood cultural rights which could evoke violence.

#### **University Culture-:**

Each university have their culture. It is a common phenomenon in the universities to target newly admitted students who are yet to be acquainted with the system. This category of students are easily deceived into gender-based violence by the naïve students.

#### **Parents' financial strength-:**

Some parents were just struggling to give good education to their children. Parents with this kind of challenge often find it difficult to provide their children with adequate needs. Based on this student in this category tends to seek for assistance from other students or elsewhere, and if care is not taken, it could lead to exposing them to gender-based violence experience.

#### **Lack of contemptment on the part of the Student-:**

Some of the Nigeria University student are never satisfied with what their parents are able to afford for them. This sets of students are often found jumping from one boyfriend to another. Some will even cultivate the attitude of befriending married men. This are the category of students that always move with high society ladies that will organize them for different men in exchange for money. They are those that involves in trafficking.

**Sexual behaviour of university Students-:** Sexual behavior are the ways individuals performs the sexual activities that are peculiar to them. As found by Olusegun, (2012). The way some students relates sexually with the opposite sex often enhances their experience of Gender – based violence. In a survey carted out by Katie & Tiefer (2006), on sexual behavior of students in different countries such as Canada, France and others; it was found that some of the students had experienced different forms of sexual relationship and acts, involve in intimate relationship, having steady boy/girlfriends, forced sexual intercourse, had sexual intercourse without consent , and also in consensual relationships and that students sexual behavioural encounters are increasingly taken place outside the context of romantic relationship to purely sexual hook ups. Above could be the reason for the prevalence of GBV

in Nigerian Universities. Imagine if those that have used to regular dating does not have such opportunity while on campus, there is no way they will not apply violence acts,

### **Dressing of some students also exposed them to gender based violence-:**

Some are in the habit of exposing sensitive parts of their body. Men often seize this as opportunity to molest females, especially when they were in isolated areas.

### **Cultists Activities-:**

Cultist activities is another factor that aggravate gender- based violence in Nigeria Universities.

Unnecessary familiarity with Lecturers and peers. This is a key factor to the experience of gender –based violence on university campus.

### **Underreported- cased of GBV-:**

If victims of GBV are bold to report the perpetrators, and expose them to desired punishment, others will curb themselves.

### **Lack of adequate security-:**

Most of the Nigerian Universities are too porous, students can go out and comes into the campus at will and likewise strangers. Even in most of the students' hostels, there is no restriction of movement or time limit for dwellers movement.

### **Provision of essential amenities-;**

If amenities such as water, electricity and others were not made available for the use of the students in Nigeria Universities, it might expose the students to the horrors of Gender- based

## **Findings**

The study revealed that sexual violence, physical violence, sexual harassment, emotional/ psychological violence and intimate partner's violence are the forms of gender based violence experienced by students in Nigerian universities. It was also found that age of students, university social environment, problem of accommodation, university culture, parents' financial strength, lack of contemptment on the part of the student, student Sexual behavior and their mode of dressing, cultist activities, under reported cases of GBV, lack of adequate security and provision of essential amenities in the universities are the factors that influenced the gender –based violence experienced.

## **Prevention /Recommendation of Gender Based Violence in Nigerian Universities**

1. The University authorities need to strengthen the university counselling center and others that are concerned to always organize proper orientation for students regularly especially the new students and furnish them with information about the university structure and the culture of the university in order not to fall prey.
2. Government and university authorities need to resolve and find lasting solution to the problem of accommodation faced by the students. Hostels should be made available for the newly admitted students that seems to be target of the perpetrators.
3. Establishing a rapport system among Directorates of the universities Students affairs, Centre for Gender Studies, Security Units and counselling units with students to be bold and encouraged to report their experience of GBV.
4. There should be forum where parents and the school administrators will be opportune to discuss about their children. If such is made available, parents will be

encouraged to always adequate provision for their children /ward to prevent students from sexual violence.

5. There is need to provide advice and support for the students to be contempt with what their parents are able to afford for there up-keeping.
6. To prevent the prevalence and further occurrences of GBV in Nigeria universities, there is need to constitute a committee that will enforce laws on domestic violence, students dressing and perpetrators of GBV, and the adequate punishment for offender.

If all the above measures could be put in place and effect properly in the university community, Gender –based violent will become history in Nigeria universities.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that students in Nigeria universities experienced different forms of gender based violence. It was also concluded that their experience of gender based violence was due to the age of students, university social environment, problem of accommodation, university culture, parents' financial strength, lack of contemptment on the part of the student, student Sexual behavior and their mode of dressing, cultist activities, under reported cases of gender based violence, lack of adequate security and provision of essential amenities in the universities.

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