

Violence Against Women (VAW) in Tertiary Institutions: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is globally recognized as a public health issue. Most studies on this subject focus on women because more often, they are the victims of this form of violence; hence the specific focus of this research is violence against women (VAW). This study investigates the prevalence, pattern and causal factors for VAW among female students in Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Nigeria. In addition, the study examines the causes and effects of this malaise on victims. Possible ways of reducing occurrence of VAW against female undergraduates are also proffered. The study is cross-sectional and descriptive in nature. Data were collected with a pilot tested, semi-structured questionnaire; self-administered by the respondents. Data were analyzed with the *Epi. Info software*. Respondents were selected using a 3-level multistage sampling technique. Results and conclusion are based on 421 valid responses. Mean age of respondents was 21.65 ± 2.67 years and majority (95.49%) are single. 116 students (27.55%) reported experiencing at least one form of violence and 97 (83.62%) of these cases went unreported while 10 (8.62%) of the reported cases did not receive any form of retribution for the perpetrator. Reasons for victims not reporting GBV includes 'fear of not being believed' (13.4%), 'fear of being victimized for reporting' (22.68%), feeling powerless against the perpetrator (18.56%), feeling of being indebted to or at the mercy of the perpetrator (28.89%), 'knowing that nothing will be done even if I report' (16.49%). Three patterns of violence were reported among the respondents: physical such as beating (6.03%), hitting (13.45%) and physical assault (11.21%); sexual including rape (7.76%), touching sensitive body parts without consent (24.41%), sexual harassment (18.10%); psychological such as use of obscene or sex-oriented language (11.21%), sending unwanted text messages/calls (7.76%). Emotional devastation, depression, lack of concentration on academics, emotional effects (embarrassment or fear) and physical scars were the reported effects of VAW on victims.

Keywords: Gender-based violence/VAW, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse.

1.0 Introduction

Violence, as defined by the Webster dictionary means "aggression, from one person against another who resists it". This suggests that in violent occurrences, there is the violator, and the person being violated. By further defining violence as 'a turbulent state resulting in injuries and destruction', the dictionary categorizes the consequences of violence broadly into two division: physical and psychological. Any form of violence targeted at an individual based on their gender is referred to as Gender Based Violence (GBV) (WHO, 2013a, UN 2013). Any person, irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation could be a victim of GBV and abuse could be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual (). Several studies and reports however suggest that

women and adolescent girls constitute the greatest population of victims of GBV (UNFPA, 2011, WHO 2013b, WHO 2012).

VAW is defined by the United Nations 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (UNFPA, 1993;) Examples of actions that constitute VAW includes but are not restricted to physical beatings/flogging (both in public and in private) (), sexual abuse/molestation (Casey and Lindhorst 2009) with the most gruesome been rape (Lonsway et al, 2009), mental/emotional/verbal abuse and or torture. (Jewkes, 2010; Howard, 2010), UN identifies the

possibilities of such violence occurring in the homes and/or in the general public including schools (UNFPA, 2011).

Violence is most often targeted at females because they are perceived as weak, and are seen not to be equal to the male gender (Flood et al, 2010). And most organized religion and culture sustain such unequal power relations by validating the subordination of the female gender to the male gender (Fayemi, 2013). The view of the authors, in agreement with (Bohra et al, 2015) is that the perception that the female gender is inferior to the male gender would account for why men and boys are largely the violators, while women and girls are the violated.

In describing females who experience violence, some argue that the use of the term 'victim' projects violated women/girls as passive, weak, and inherently vulnerable (UN, 2006) while others argue that the term 'survivor' denies the reality of the victimization women who are violated experience. This research however adopts the term victim/survivor interchangeably. 'Undergraduate females' (UF) is used to address the female student population in tertiary institutions. And the term violator/perpetrator is used to describe men who engage in acts of violence against females in general, and UF in particular.

This study investigates the prevalence, pattern and causal factors for violence against women among female students in Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Nigeria. In addition, the study examined the causes and effects of this malaise on victims. Possible ways of reducing occurrence of VAW against female undergraduates are also proffered.

1.1 Literature Review

Several studies reveal that the degree of VAW in schools is becoming significant. 32.4% of 295 female students at the Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, said they had been raped (). At the University of Kano, Northern Nigeria, 22.8%, 22.2% and 50.8% of 300 female students experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence respectively (Illiyasu and Abubakar, 2011). A Survey conducted at University of Port Harcourt reveals that 46.7% of 400 female undergraduates suffered one form of sexual violence or the other. Of the 46.7%, 33.7% are

cases of fondling/grabbing of sensitive body parts (Mezie-Okoye, 2014).

To address the challenge of VAW in tertiary institutions, and seek solutions, it is important that its causes be identified. It should be noted that there are some VAW, occurring in tertiary institution, causes of which are peculiar to the status of the female undergraduates being students. There are however certain forms of violence female undergraduates experience just because they are females. In instances of the latter, violence would still have occurred irrespective of female undergraduates statuses as students or otherwise.

One reason attributed to male perpetration of violence against the female gender is patriarchy and other forms of unequal power relations. According to the UN, the many forms and manifestations of violence, despite women's differing positions point to the intersection between gender-based subordination of females to male (Heisse 2011). Most societies, culture and religion reinforce the belief that the male gender is superior to the female gender (). These manifestations are easily observable in parents' preferences of male child over a female child (), sexual objectification of the female and the female anatomy (), domestication of the female in homes and so on. Most male undergraduates do not see their female counterparts as equals (Ilika (2005). They bear the 'superior-gender' mentality, and this plays a negative role in the amount of respect accorded the females. The male gender is projected as superior to the female gender, some societies, culture and religion encourage that male children express and enforce their 'masculinity'- (often interpreted to mean superiority to the female gender) through violence means (Mapayi et al, 2011, Khesa 2014). This happens especially in resolving conflicts. It is not out of place to see a male undergraduate threatening to discipline his female counterpart by physically beating her up, or even getting her raped. In most cases, they actually carry out such threats! There are also cases of body groping, stalking, and use of abusive and demeaning remarks.

Literature also shows that violence is often perpetrated against females because of the non-responsive nature of justice against perpetrators of VAW. When an individual is duly punished for a crime, such person is deterred from further

committing same crime. The public is discouraged as well. But the status quo in Nigeria is that most perpetrators of VAW are left off the hook. The process of justice rather than punish perpetrators leaves the survivor stigmatized rather than vindicated. It is a tragedy of victim blaming, and shaming (Eze-Anaba, 2006). This tragedy is a reflection of the disconnection between the society, the law and victims of VAW. Simply put, the law, and by extension, the society fail to ensure that a survivor of VAW gets justice. Yet, according to experts, violence against women is not a women's issue but that of the men who are the perpetrators, and also society's business. The impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of VAW, according UN Secretary-General, remains the foremost reason why the chain of silence among victims of VAW has not been smashed. Nigeria is signatory to several international laws (Illiyasu and Abubakar 2012), and also have local legislations in place to help tackle the issue of VAW. Yet, the country has not succeeded in efforts to bring perpetrators to book. Prosecutors in some cases even collaborate with offenders to aid justice evasion!¹

Another reason for VAW, especially among students in tertiary institutions is the live-in-lover factor. In tertiary institutions, especially non-residential ones, it is not strange to see male and female students cohabiting as married couples in rented apartments off campus. There exists between them, a husband/wife relationship, where the male student assumes the role of the head. In this arrangement, female students are largely domesticated; they cook, launder their partners' clothes, shop, and so on. It is popularly known and referred to as *couples' life*. One of the dangers of this form of cohabitation is that the female undergraduates are mostly exposed to the threat of VAW.

Victims of VAW in tertiary institutions experience forced and unwanted pregnancies, with their violators backing out of such pregnancies even when identified. In most cases, violators are not even aware, or are aware without the knowledge of the survivor. Most of the victims who find themselves in the above situation attempt to have unsafe abortions that may result in loss/damage of vital female organ e.g. uterus, or in extreme cases, death (Sedgh et al, 2012, Silverman et al, 2007). Since violators hardly have records of using protective measures like condom, the female undergraduates are at

high risks of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV (Black 2011, Jewkes 2010). Loss of dignity and self-esteem as well as depression (Achor and Ibekwe, 2012; Devries et al, 2013) that might lead to academic non-performance are other consequences. Further research might help determine if VAW in tertiary institutions affect the quality of female undergraduates produced by tertiary institutions and turned out to the labor force and general societies at large.

2.0. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Site

This study was conducted at Moshood Abiola Polytechnic (MAPOLY), Abeokuta in November, 2016. MAPOLY was formally established in 1980 as Ogun State Polytechnic the institution is on her permanent site - the Ojere campus -, which, is situated in the Obafemi Owode Local Government Area in the South-Eastern part of Abeokuta, covering about 960 hectares of land bounded by the Ogun River to the south. MAPOLY offers 2-year National Diploma Courses and 2-year Higher National Diploma Courses with Full-Time and Part-Time programmes in five schools and twenty-three departments. The institution is non-residential for both staff and students.

2.2 Study Population

The research involved only female students in both Full-time and Part-time programmes. The data collection took place towards the end of the second semester 2015/2016 Academic session. This guaranteed that all eligible students would have spent at least two semesters in the institution. This duration would have given them the opportunity to experience various events and facets of social life on campus and its environs. As such, they would be able to make meaningful contribution to the study.

2.3 Study Design

The research is descriptive in nature. Also, it is a cross-sectional research because data were collected from a random sample (cross section) of the student population at a specific point in time.

2.4 Sample size

Sample size for this study was calculated using the Cochran formulae for sample size calculation. Taking a prevalence of 46.7% obtained from a previous similar studyⁱⁱ, 4% acceptable sampling error and 5% significance level, the minimum acceptable sample size obtained is 598 respondents. To compensate for non-response, invalid data from respondents and possibly losses of questionnaires, sample size was increased by 10%. This gave a sample size of 658.

2.5 Sampling technique

Multistage sampling was adopted in order to have a representative sample. Selection was done in three stages. First, three schools were randomly selected out of the five schools in the institution. The three schools selected have a total of eleven departments. In the second level of selection two departments each were randomly selected and finally at the third level, a list of all students in the selected department was compiled to serve as the sampling frame. The required number of students was then selected from the sampling frame. Where the selected student happens to be male, the selection is rejected and redone again until a female is selected. The process is repeated until the required number of respondents was obtained. Selected students were informed about the survey and their informed consent obtained prior to participation in the survey. Respondents were also assured that they could withdraw from the study at anytime without any negative repercussion.

2.6 Data Collection.

Data was collected with a structured questionnaire, self-administered by the respondents. The questionnaire is in two parts; the first part elicited information on the respondents' socio-demographic variables including age, marital status, religion, ethnicity and department. The second part elicited information on the core research issue. This section had nine questions ranging from the nature of violence experienced, relationship of

respondents with perpetrator, Prior to the administration; informed consent of respondents was sought and obtained. Respondents were also assured of confidentiality of information as well as anonymity. For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, questionnaires were administered in sealed envelopes and completed questionnaires were returned the same way.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

A total of 658 questionnaires were administered, but only 473 were completed and returned. However, only 421 of the 473 questionnaires that were completed and returned were analyzed; 52 of the returned questionnaires were not properly filled, hence unsuitable for analysis. In all the study had a response rate of 63.98%

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
16-20	73	17.34
21 -25	247	58.67
26 -30	63	14.96
>30	38	9.03
Total	421	100.00
Marital Status		
Married	11	2.61
Single	402	95.49
Cohabiting	8	1.90
Total	421	100.00
Religion		
Christianity	303	71.97
Islam	118	28.03
Total	421	100.00
Level		
ND	213	50.59
HND	208	49.41
Total	421	100.00

The mean age of respondents was 21.65 years with a standard deviation of 2.67 years. The actual ages of the respondents ranged from 16 years to over 30 years. However, majority

(58.67%) were in the 21 – 25 years age bracket. As is typical of undergraduate students, majority (95.49%) of the respondents were not married. Majority (71.97%) are also Christians.

3.2 Prevalence of Gender-based violence

One hundred and sixteen (116) students, about 27.55% of the respondents reported having experienced one form of violence or the other perpetrated by a male in the course of their stay in the institution.

Table 2: Forms of violence among respondents

Form/pattern of Violence	Frequency	Percentage
Physical		
Beating	7	6.03
Physical Assault	13	11.21
Hitting	16	13.79
Sexual		
Rape	9	7.76
Touching sensitive body parts without consent	21	18.10
Sexual harassment	17	14.66
Psychological		
Verbal abuse/insult	7	6.03
Demeaning Remarks	4	3.45
Use of obscene/sex-oriented language	13	11.21
Sending unwanted text messages/calls	9	7.76
Total	116	100.00

Majority of the respondents experienced episodes of violence while in the National Diploma (ND) programme; 71.56% experienced violence while in the ND programme while

28.44% experience violence while in the Higher National Diploma (HND) programme. With reference to marital status, 93.10% of those who reported having experience violence from a male are single, 4.31% cohabits with a male partner while 2.59% are married. Different forms of violence experienced by respondents could be categorized into three: physical, sexual and psychological. Forms of violence experienced by respondents are summarized in Table 2.

Majority of the respondents (34.48%) reported that the act of violence was perpetrated by other male students, 22.41% reported that violence was perpetrated by their boyfriend, 14.67% reported that a consensual sexual partner perpetrated violence, 22.41% reported that a stranger perpetrated violence while 6.03% reported violence perpetrated by a lecturer.

The result in Figure 1 shows that physical, sexual and psychological violence is perpetrated by boyfriends, consensual sexual partners, other male students and strangers; the only form of violence perpetrated by lecturers is psychological, specifically making 'demeaning remarks' to students as well as 'verbal abuse/insult'.

Table 3: Rate of occurrence of violence

Rate of occurrence of violence	Frequency	Percentage
Once	19	16.38
Twice	18	15.52
Three times	16	13.80
More than three times	63	54.31
Total	116	100.00

Table 3 above shows that majority of the respondents have experienced violence against them by male counterparts more than three times.

Only 16.30% of the respondents reported the incidence of violence experienced. Majority (83.62%) of respondents who reported ever

experiencing a form of violence on campus or its environs did not report the incidence. Of those who reported, 52.63% did not receive any form of retribution for the perpetrator.

Reasons for victims not reporting incidence of violence by male includes 'fear of not being believed' (13.40%), 'fear of being victimized for reporting' (22.68%), feeling powerless against the perpetrator (18.56%), feeling of being indebted to or at the mercy of the perpetrator (28.87%), 'knowing that nothing will be done even if I report' (16.49%).

3.3 Factors predisposing male students to perpetration of violence

Logistic regression was fitted to investigate the factors that predisposed male students to perpetrate violence on their female counterparts. A summary of result is presented in Table 5.

The result in Table 5 shows that male students who consume alcoholic drinks are almost 2 times more likely to perpetrate violence against female students. Similarly, those who consume psychoactive substances are 3 times more likely to perpetrate violence against their female counterparts.

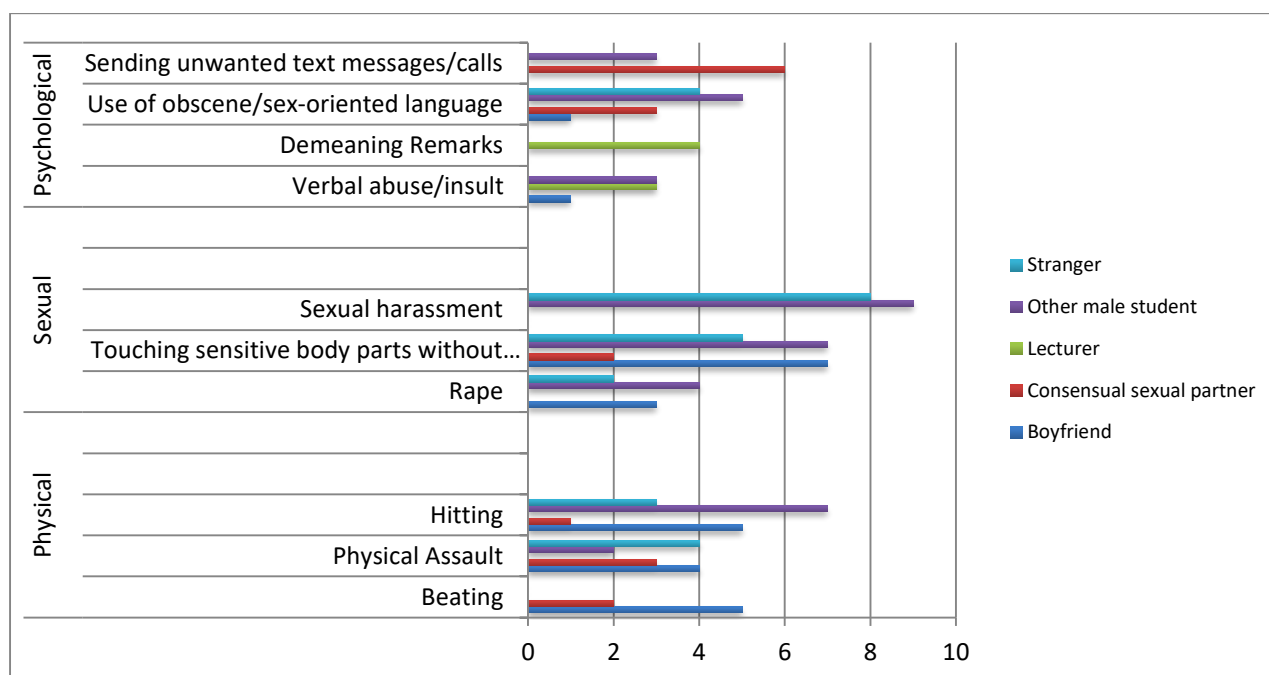
The result in Table 6 shows that female students who cohabit with male are almost 3 times more likely to experience violence from their male partners than those who do not cohabit. In the same vein, female students who attend parties are about 2 times more likely to experience violence from male students. Further analysis reveal that level (ND or HND) is significantly associated with the experience of violence. Female students in the ND programme are more likely to be victims of violence on campus ($p=0.001$, $OR=1.87$, $CI=1.32-2.19$).

Table 4: Handling Violence

Handling Violence	Freq.	%
Did you ever report the incidence of violence?		
Yes	19	16.30
No	97	83.62
Total	116	100.00
Who did you report the incidence to?		
Nobody	97	83.62
School Authority	0	0.00
Parents/family members	2	1.72
Friends	4	3.46
Law enforcement Agencies	2	1.72
Medical Personnel	11	9.48
Total	116	100.00
Reasons for not reporting		
Fear of not being believed	13	13.40
Fear of being victimized for reporting	22	22.68
Feeling powerless against the perpetrator	18	18.56
Feeling of being indebted to or at the mercy of the perpetrator	28	28.87
Knowing that nothing will be done even if I report	16	16.49
Total	97	100.00
Punishment for perpetrator where incidence of violence was reported		
Nothing	10	52.63
Scolding	3	15.79
Detained but later let go	4	21.05
Detained and rightly punished	2	10.53
Total	19	100.00

The prevalence of violence against female students among the respondents is about 28%; this suggest that about one out of every three female students experience one form of violence or the other. This prevalence is low compared to what has been reported by other studies conducted in tertiary institutions in South-South Nigeria (Mezie-okoye and Alamina, 2014, Effa et al, 2009). It compares with what obtained

Figure 1: Association between perpetrator and form of violence



amongst tertiary institutions in Kano (Kullina et al., 2010) but it higher than the prevalence reported in Maiduguri (Illiyasu et al, 2011). This points to the fact that this malaise is an issue that requires some attention and strategic effort must be put in place in to curb it.

The result also suggests that violence has become habitual among the students that participated in the survey because majority (54.31%) reported experiencing violence more than three times. Occurrence of violence once or twice could be regarded as chance events, but experience of violence in any form it might take by the same person more than three times is obviously not coincidental.

with respect to reportage of the act of violence against them, majority of the female students who participated in the survey did not consider the acts worthy of reporting. Reasons for not reporting are summarized in Table 5. Of the few who reported, more than half (52.63%) of the

reported cases did not receive any form of retribution for the perpetration. Little wonder cases of violence against female undergraduate students are not reported. It is also saddening that none of those who reported even considered it necessary to report to the school authority.

Based on the result of this study, we make the following recommendations to help ameliorate the occurrence of VAW among the study population

- More responsive and trusted units should be put in place in tertiary institutions to specifically address cases of VAW. For example, we could have GBV units in our schools, staffed with experts on such matters.

Table 5: Logistic regression of factors predisposing male students to perpetrate violence against their female counterparts

	OR	SE	P-value	95% CI for OR
Consumption of Alcohol by perpetrator				
Yes	1.81	0.117	0.012	1.581 2.039
No*	-	-	-	-
Consumption of psychoactive substance by perpetrator				
Yes	3.03	0.311	<0.001	1.651 5.589
No*	-	-	-	-

- reference group

Table 6: Factors predisposing female students to violence from male counterparts

	OR	SE	P-value	95% CI for OR
Cohabiting with perpetrator				
Yes	2.86	0.49	<0.001	1.90 3.82
No*	-	-	-	-
Attending parties				
Yes	2.04	0.18	0.003	1.69 2.39
No*	-	-	-	-
Programme				
ND	1.87	0.19	0.01	1.50 2.24
HND*	-	-	-	-

* reference group

- Well-rounded form of conversations should be encouraged in academic communities for the purpose of creating awareness about VAW, its causes, its dangers and possible ways of eliminating it.
- Involve male undergraduates in raising awareness about issues of VAW and possible ways of creating a violence free world for females in general.
- Avoid stigmatizing victims of violence. This could be subtly, but significantly, achieved by changing the manner of

reporting or referring to such cases. We can for example change the narrative by stigmatizing the violator. Instead of saying: "Tinke was raped", say: "Gbenga raped Tinke or Gbenga is a rapist!"

- Put more advocacies in place to help protect female undergraduates, and as the case may demand, help out in cases of violence occurrence. Presently, the female undergraduate population seems not be adequately covered in the public advocacy on VAW.
- The Government, through the law-makers should put in place strict criminal consequences for violators to serve as deterrence to themselves and others.

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