



## **Curbing Sexual and Gender Based Violence: Implication for Insecurity in Boarding Secondary Schools in Northern Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

This study explored curbing sexual and gender based violence: Implication for insecurity in boarding secondary schools in Northern Nigeria. The repositioning women access to quality education for improving social development is a thing of concerned and fundamental. The study centered its discussion on the following conceptual clarifications thus, gender based violence in secondary schools and three types of gender-based violence as discussed such as bullying, kidnapping and abduction, and sexual abuse and harassment. Three factors influencing gender based violence such as school distance, media and technology and lack of girl-friendly school environment were discussed. Challenges curbing school-based violence and gender which includes implementation of laws protecting the right of a child, lack of communities cooperation, lack of expertise. Ways forward in gender based violence in the perspectives, in curbing the menace of gender based violence in Nasarawa State secondary schools the gender based violence experts should create security awareness among youth. It was concluded that the rate of sexual harassment and gender based violence in boarding secondary schools with

girl-child being the victims tends to constitute a serious threat in the society as reported by this study. Conversely, both boys and girls have been documented to be victims of this act, but the rate at which it is affecting girl-child is alarming in most of the schools.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, gender-based violence, insecurity, boarding schools

## Introduction

Repositioning women access to quality education for improves social development in Nigeria and Africa at large is a thing of concerned and fundamental over the years. Education is the process of becoming critically aware of one's reality in a manner that leads to effective action upon it. Education therefore, remains the bedrock for national development. For a country to be technologically sound, economically reliant and politically vibrant, it will depend on the quality of education of its citizenry. It is in recognition of this that the Federal Government of Nigeria, (2014) that education is adopted as an instrument par excellence for effective national development. In view of this, the second National Development plan spelled out five goals to be achieved through Education which includes the following:

- a free and democratic society,
- a just and egalitarian society,
- a united strong and self-reliant Nations,

- a just and dynamic economic, and
- a land of bright and full opportunity.

On these bases that most of the secondary schools education in Nigeria today explored learners to many subjects so as to give opportunity to learn the subjects of their choice readiness for future growth and development lay upon how the students are trained. In order to achieve knowledge for national development, teachers must have sufficient knowledge subject taught in schools which most have been link between the primary and the university levels of education. Education at secondary school level is supposed to be the bedrock and the foundation towards higher knowledge in tertiary institutions. It is an investment, as well as an instrument that can be used to achieve a more rapid economic, social, political, technological, scientific and cultural development in a country (Henry, 2018). Girl-child education is one of the basic attempts to get academic emancipation

for the girl child. The evidence of ethnicity, culture, illiteracy, ignorance and religious beliefs that exist within the country makes accommodating the girl child education a topical issue in Nigeria. Many parents consider education for a girl child as a waste of time, energy and resources compared to a boy child (Huzeru, 2012; Atama, 2012). Girls are also favoured by mainly Nigerian women to assist in the labour force (Okam & Shuaibu, 2019). These challenges affect a certain class, preventing girls from accessing educational opportunities.

Furthermore, in some of the Nigerian communities, the families still believe that girls must be given out in marriage at a very young age because it is believed that their only roles are those of wives and mothers (Okam & Shuaibu, 2019). Wodon, Male, Nayihouba, Onagoruwa, Savadogo, Yedan, Edmeades, Kes, John, Murithi, Steinhaus, and Petroni (2017) opine that young girls who end up in early marriage are usually unable to finish schools, and this puts them at a disadvantage of not being able to secure any good income; thus, they are dependent for their whole lives. Ajaegbu (2005) attributes some of the challenges being faced by women to the cultural practices of early marriages. Nigerian girls are usually victims of systems that disadvantage them mostly revolving around the culture and traditions. They are gender-disadvantaged based on the cultural construct developed by the society (Umoh, 2004). The gender roles are passed from one generation to the next, and they are practised without questioning them such that they become the norm. Through these roles, girls are marginalised because of their gender, age, culture and race, (Amoah 2007). The more women are prone to gender inequality and regarded as second-class citizens, the more their overall well-being will be affected. Poor women are the most affected as Wodon et al. (2017) state that a whole 96% cannot read or write in the north-western part of Nigeria, while only 1% of the people in the southeastern part of the country are rich. According to the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) affirms that education as its top priority, both as a right and as an instrument of development to address the wide gap of inequalities caused by illiteracy, ethnicity, culture, ignorance and religious beliefs within the society. The policy strongly ensures gender equity in the delivery of basic education provision in Nigeria (FRN, 2014).

Furthermore, the policy specifically highlights how these principles conform with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as follows:

- a. A commitment by all stakeholders to gender equality, social justice and equity
- b. To strive for gender balance at all levels of policy planning and implementation

- c. To commit to free and compulsory Basic education as a human right to all children irrespective of gender, at all levels of the system (federal, state, LGA, community and school)
- d. That the federal and state governments acknowledge and exercise responsibility to provide Nigerians, and especially girls, with adequate information to ensure enrolment in, retention and completion of basic education
- e. That various levels of government in Nigeria acknowledge and exercise their responsibility to provide for the basic education and well-being of pupils especially girls, which shall be fulfilled by the provision of appropriate gender sensitive, child friendly school/schooling environments.

Consequently, the issues of insecurity in the Nigeria and Nasarawa State to be specific is the focused of the paper, Situations of insecurity triggers traumatic disorder and toxic stress that affect learning negatively. General school attendance and enrolment are equally affected as parents pull their children out of schools while in some extreme cases, insecurity has led to closure of schools. According Ibrahim (2021) reported that, about 800 secondary school and university students have been kidnapped in coordinated attacks by terrorists and bandits in the last six months alone. Although these abductions did not begin recently, it has become frequent today than it was in 2014 when 276 girls were abducted from Government Girls' Secondary school, Chibok, Borno State, December 11, 2020, when 344 male students were abducted from their hostels in Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State and barely two weeks later on December 20, 2020, 80 pupils of the Islamiyya School, Mahuta, Kaduna State were abducted. February 17, 2021, saw another outburst of rage when 27 students were abducted from GSS College, Kagara, Niger State.

In Zamfara State, 279 more girls of Government Secondary School Jangebe were abducted on February 26, 2021. The Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, Kaduna State also had its fair share of the insecurity, when 39 of its students were kidnapped on the midnight of March 11, 2021. Nine days later, another bandit attack led to the abduction of 23 students of Greenfield University, Kaduna State. Three more students were kidnapped on April 24, 2021 from the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Benue State. According to Abari and Orunbon, (2020) that due to insecurity several states are shutting down boarding schools in violence-prone areas. This will, no doubt, add to the over 13.5 million out-of-school children in Nigerian today. According to available data, 30% of pupils drop out of primary school and only 54% transit to junior secondary schools. While these figures are results of

extreme poverty, child labour, early marriage in girls, insecurity currently takes the cake. About 80% of out-of-school children today are in Northern Nigeria. With security systems destabilized, schools closed due to insecurity and poverty ravaging the core north, these former students are ready targets for terrorist recruitments.

Upon these alarming rates of insecurity, the Nasarawa State Commissioner of Education Hajiya Sabo on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2022 announced the shutting of the schools on account of intelligence reports about security threats in neighbouring Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Though currently, all boarding public and private schools shall resume on Sunday, September 18, for the First Term of the 2022/2023 academic session, while day schools shall resume on Monday, September 19.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

According to Galle, Atiku and Gado, (2019) stated that gender is a socially constructed term depicting the system of relations between males and females, and designates behaviours, attitudes, roles, status and other processes that govern the relationship among sexes in a given educational, socio-economic and political context. Gender is defined as the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex either boy or girl (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary cited in Galle, Alaku, & Paul, 2020).

### **Gender Based Violence in Secondary Schools**

Violence according to World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) is seen as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation, School violence wears many faces. It includes gang activity, locker theft, bullying and intimidation, gun use, assault; just about anything, that produces a victim. Specifically, students these days physically, mentally or verbally abuse one another (Aluede, 2011). Thus, the use of guns, knives and other dangerous weapons and other abuses – physical or psychological is now more common than ever in Nigerian secondary school system (Aluede, 2006; Fajoku, 2009, Federal Ministry of Education, 2007). This study used only three types of gender-based violence as discussed below. Thus

### **Bullying:**

Bullying is a pervasive problem in schools that affects many students. In recent times, it is becoming a bigger crisis with vicious consequences. Bullying is not just a child's

play, but also a terrifying experience many schoolchildren face every day (Aluede, 2006; Beran, 2005; Craig, 1998; Thornberg, 2010). Bullying according to Aluede (2011) is a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence to which students are exposed. It is a form of social interaction in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behaviour intended to cause distress to the less dominant individual (the victim).

In some studies, bullying has been conceptualized as acting in any way that threatens or hurts someone less powerful. Bullying does not occur when there is conflict between students of equal or similar strength (Aluede, 2011). This distinction is important because of the effects of being repeatedly attacked or threatened by stronger student or group of students are likely to differ from the effects of being threatened or attacked by someone of equal power. In the former case, one is apt to feel more helpless (Fajoju, 2009).

### **Kidnapping and Abduction:**

The activities of militancy in Nigeria have constituted serious threat on girls as the most vulnerable of their attacks and make many girls of formal education to abandon school (Saleh, 2011). Kidnapping can be seen as false imprisonment in the sense that it involves the illegal confinement of individuals against their own will by another individual or group of individuals in such a way as to violate the confined individual's right to be free from the restraint of movement (Ngwama, 2014).

This is often done for ransom or in furtherance of another crime. No one is free from being kidnapped but easy targets in school are most girls. In Nigeria, the kidnapers are everywhere with little or no resistance from the law enforcement agents. Nigerian security system has been weakened in the face of this confrontation, a little has been done to find the socio-economic and underlining factors precipitating this crime (Ngwama, 2014). This trend has made possible for students to be kidnapped and abducted from within and outside the school environment.

### **Sexual Abuse and Harassment:**

Sexual violence has been defined as any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts to traffic women's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force by any person regardless of relationship to the survivor in any setting (Krug, Dahlberg & Mercy, 2002). Cases of rape on school's girls have become so rampant. Media is another problem that keeps exposing children sexual misbehaviour. Children are found to be abusing themselves sexually. High rate of girls getting pregnant in school has become high. Many parents are discouraged

from taking their girls to school due to this problem (Migosi, Nanok, Ombuki & Metet, 2012).

The case of enforcing law on sexual offenders is very low. The legal requirements are made complicated and officers responsible for charging sexual offenders seem to have no interest in following any sexual case up. In some instances, where those responsible for girls' pregnancies are taken court, the law enforcement agencies frustrate the efforts of parents and refuse to take action on the culprits. Sometimes they collaborate with the wrong doers. This becomes an excuse for the reluctant parents to send their girls to school (Migosi, Nanok, Ombuki & Metet, 2012)

### **Factors Influencing Gender Based Violence (GBV)**

There are various factors influencing gender based violence among which few were discussed below:

#### **1. School Distance:**

Relatively long distances to school, which exceed 7-10 kilometres such as noted in so many basic schools in Nigeria, often served as disincentives to schooling and give so many rooms for gender-based violence (Indabawa, 2004; Salman, Olawole & Yahaya, 2011). According to Oluma (2013) distance from school is a factor which is noted to affect girls participation in schooling. There were many cases of school girls reported being raped by male colleagues, strangers or members of the neighbouring communities; and some even missing without trace in towns (Omare, 2007). Girls being sexually harassed on their way to or from school, is a serious problem in basic schools. There is a common fear that girls attending far school could be exposed to rape, abduction or even being killed. According to UNGEI (2009) when schools are located at a distance that is believed to be too far, the possibility of girls to be exposed to violent attacked is very high.

School location: is a serious factor promoting gender-based violence on girls and discourages many parents from sending their daughters to school (Bakwai, Yisa & Jega, 2014). Parents will not allow their daughter to walk long distance to school for the fear of sexual harassment and other form of violence, instead they keep their daughter under closer watch (Oniye & Okoro, 2006).

#### **2. Media and Technology.**

The world is shifting from an industrial society to a service-dominated and network-based knowledge society (Mohanty, 2005). Information and communication technology (ICT) is emerging as an important catalyst for transformation of education in the globalizing world. Today ICT forms the "backbone" of several educational institutions. It is also an important value- adding component of school

products, such as television, camera and mobile telephone. ICT has facilitated packaging of information (good or bad) and sending the same across the world at negligible cost. However, in as much as the Internet provides enormous convenience as well as propels the nation's education, the Internet which is an open, free and unregulated device has also brought with it negative challenges to secondary schools that cannot be overlooked. The Internet is known to corrupt the minds of students, especially the adolescents, by exposing them to illicit and immoral activities and behaviour. It also influences and change students' moral perspectives and ethical values. Among the negative consequences of ICT (internet and cable networks) to Nigeria secondary schools is how youth were exposure to negative western culture most particularly violence (Adesina, 2012).

This is because youth imitates what they see good or bad. School violence is caused by learning and reinforcement. Violent behaviours are learned through observation (Lawal & Ishaq 2011). Media (digital or otherwise) is another problem that keeps exposing secondary schools students into sexual misbehaviour. Omekwu (2000, pp104) observed that the more dangerous dimensions of the digital revolution include pornography, cultism, kidnapping, raping, abduction and other form of gender based violence, which all constitute a threat to established good school culture. It is extremely difficult for Nigeria to tolerate the level of pornographic activities that go on the Internet, which undoubtedly promoted the behavior of secondary school children abusing and harassing themselves sexually.

### **3. Lack of Girl-Friendly School Environments:**

A girl-friendly learning environment is being gradually acknowledged as critical to girls' participation in school. Examining the status of girls' education, the State of the World's Mothers 2005 reiterates "Girls are also deprived of education when the school environment is hostile to them. Some aspects are easier to address than others (UNGEI, 2009). Studies show that a large number of girls leave school midway through their education because of the uncongenial conditions in many schools. So, more attention must be paid to making the school environment girl-friendly. The real test of a safe environment lies in the attitude of the teachers, the way they deal with girl children and steer their classrooms.

## **Challenges Curbing School-Based Violence and Gender.**

### **1. Poor Implementation of Laws Protecting the Right of a Child:**

Most of the laws protecting the right of children are not being fully implemented. Where they are implemented, they are not fully enforced. It is sad to note that these efforts have made marginal or no impact on protecting child from violence or



specifically reducing incidence of girls related violence. This is largely because these measures have been uncoordinated, not well implemented and largely un-enforced (ICAI, 2012). If these laws were enforced or implemented, gender based violence would be minimized and girls will equally enjoy the peaceful school atmosphere like their male counterparts.

### **2. Lack of Communities Cooperation:**

Awareness of the school-based gender violence is still very low in the rural communities, particularly in the Northern States, specifically Nasarawa State. Only 1 in 10 fathers and 1 in 20 mothers are aware of school-based gender violence existence in some states in the North Central Knowledge of the school-based gender violence was affected by distance from the school, socio- economic status and political connectedness (FGN, 2008). This trend make it difficult for the SBMCs to gain community's supports and cooperation in implementing effective strategies to convert the problem of gender based violence.

### **3. Lack of Expertise:**

The school-based gender violence official are not necessarily expert in violence prevention and as such tend to do their job haphazardly

## **Ways Forward in Gender Based Violence in the Perspectives**

In curbing the menace of gender based violence in Nasarawa State secondary schools, the gender based violence experts should create security awareness among youth. Youth leadership can play a very effective role in curving gender based violence in schools by enlightening students' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors before violence becomes an automatic manifestation of anger. Gender based violence expert should focus on involving vibrant community member in most of its activities that could be integrated into secondary school programmes.

The Gender based violence experts should emphasize on repositioning women access to quality education for improves social development, and supporting the school counselors to diligently carry out their duties, introduce in the co-curriculum the teaching of empathy and anger management. This will entrench in the youth the ability to control anger when infuriated, and also have love for others as they love themselves. The Gender based violence experts should engage parents monitoring their children behaviour to prevent them from falling victims of gender based violence or indulge in abusing other children, coordinate the teaching positive behaviour through modeling, coaching, prompting, praise, social skills, conflict management, anger management, character education, signing anti- teasing or anti- bullying pledges. By this, would minimize bullying incidents in Nasarawa state secondary schools.

## Conclusion

The rate of sexual harassment and gender based violence in boarding secondary schools with girl-child being the victims tends to constitute a serious threat in the society as reported by this study. Conversely, both boys and girls have been documented to be victims of this act, but the rate at which it is affecting girl-child is alarming in most of the schools. This has great implications for the general well-being as it affects girl-child or women access to quality education for improves social development. Hence, the involvement strategies employed by the by the gender based violence experts enlightenment on the effects of gender based violence and insecurity should be in operation.

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