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# **African Journal of Nursing and Health Issues**

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# EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG FEMALE STAFF AND STUDENTS OF A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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#### **Abstract**

Aim: The study examined the experience of gender-based violence (GBV) among female staff and students of a tertiary educational institution in Southwestern Nigeria.

Design: This descriptive study adopted a multistage sampling technique to recruit staff and students into the study. All 825 staff and students participated in the study. A structured questionnaire, whose validity and reliability had previously been ascertained, was the instrument used for data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis.

Results: The mean age for students was 20.02±3.33, while that of non-academic and academic staff was 39.25±10.69 and 31.60±5.62, respectively. One-third of the participants had experienced one form of gender-based violence or another before. These range from being dispossessed of a property (10.9%); being forced to have sexual intercourse by a man against their wishes (7.8%); 4.4% having been forced to have sexual intercourse by their boyfriend/ fiancé; and 26.2% having been forced to have sexual intercourse by their husband. Unwanted sexual advances have been made towards 10.5% of the participants in the past. In all, 29.2% of the students have been violated one way or another in their lives, while 7.6% are currently being violated, compared to 39.1% of non-academic staff that have been violated in the past.

Conclusion: The experience of GBV among female staff and students is high; effort should be geared towards reversing the ugly trend to avert the numerous consequences of GBV.

**Key words:** Experience, gender, violence, intimate-partner, perception.

## INTRODUCTION

Violence pervades the lives of many people in the world, and touches everyone one way or the other<sup>1</sup>. In women's' life, violation begins when they have not even taken their first breath to the earth through sex related abortion. **Perhaps** selective the challenging stage for women is during the adolescence when they face different forms of violence ranging from psychological and sexual abuse, trafficking, early marriage, forced prostitution to rape and these forms of torture continue through their whole life<sup>2</sup>.Gender-based violence (with emphasis on violence against women) is more rampant developing countries compared to developed world<sup>3</sup>.

The declaration on elimination of violence against women adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016, describes violence against women as any act of gender-based violence against women that results in or capable of resulting in sexual, physical, or psychological harm or causing suffering to women. Such acts can happen in private or public spaces and include among other liberty deprivation or coercion<sup>4</sup>. The Center for Diseases Control (CDC) in the US has defined four different types of violence violence, comprising physical sexual violence, threat of physical or sexual violence and psychological or emotional abuse<sup>5</sup>. Economic violence is another category of violence identified by the UN special report on violence against women perpetrated usually by an intimate partner or family member and includes economic deprivation, education, health, property and employment access denial<sup>6</sup>.

In a study to assess the experience of workplace violence among female workers in some selected food industries, a group of researchers found out that about fifty percent (49.5%) of their participants had experienced GBV in their workplace while 47.3% faced emotional violence and 14.8% faced sexual violence but none of them experienced physical violence<sup>3</sup>. In their study the key perpetrators for emotional violence were seniors (86.0%) while for sexual violence it was found to be male co- workers (66.7%).

With the use of Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey 2013, it was reported in astudy that women status and communitynorms are strong predictors of intimate relationship violence against women in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. They indicated that women with socioeconomic status in Nigeria are at greater risk of violence from intimate relationships. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), important type of GBV is considered a public health problem, and research worldwide has stressed the importance of its prevention and its negative effects on health<sup>7</sup>. Educational and economicstatus of women had been found to be closely correlated to domestic violence, with the subjects being either witnesses or victims<sup>1,8</sup>. Also, studies had documented that violent behaviour may be transmittedacross generations<sup>1,9</sup>.

Gender-based violence against women in Nigeria occur in many areas but may be seen more as domestic issue occurring within the family. It usually happens to the woman or the girl child within the family. According to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey

2018, gender-based violence include rape (more among family members), womenbeing beaten up by their husbands, verbal abuse, incest, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage, denial of right to choose spouse, denial of the right to own a property, refusal to permit women to work or to control their own income, refusing the girl child to go to school, all forms of cruelty for example degrading awoman by treating her as if she were a child, refusing her any affection or sexual satisfaction<sup>10</sup>. It also includes restricting a woman's relationship with the wide community such as friends, colleagues or relatives, seeing women as incompetent, worthless or inferior to men, girls trafficking with the intention of using them as commercial sex workers<sup>10</sup>. Other forms are physical assaults imposed on widows indirectly regarded as widow's rites<sup>10</sup>.

According to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018,31% of women in Nigeria between the age 15 and 49 yearshave experienced one form of physicalviolence or the other and 36% of ever- married women had experienced one formof sexual, physical or emotional violence from their spouse<sup>10</sup>. Some cultural practices and belief in Nigeria still accord women second class status contributing to violence against women in our society. For instance, in some tribes in Nigeria, a woman has no right to inherit her husband's property. Widows are humiliated, confined andrestricted for as long as one year, all in the name of mourning her late husband. Many acts of violence against women in Nigeria cut across cultures, traditions, class, and ethnic groups. Most women in Nigeria like

many other African countries are not aware of their right. Among the few that are aware of their right are usually forced to tolerate consequences of the violence until it affects their health and possibly leading to death.

Intimate partner violence causes a wide range of negative effects on the health of women<sup>11</sup> and children, such as injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems, sexually transmitted diseases, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>12</sup>. In addition, a significant number of deaths among women are considered to result from IPV<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, children who witness IPV in their home are also significantly more likely to experience or perpetrate IPV than children who do not<sup>14</sup>.

Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2018), puts the prevalence of intimate partner violence among women in South Western Nigeria according into different categories including12.7% emotional violence; 29.8% physical violence; 3.6 % physical violence during pregnancy; 5.3 % sexual violence; 2.4% physical & sexual violence; and 2.3% physical, sexual &emotional violence<sup>10</sup>. Few information is available about experiences of gender-based violence among female university students in Nigeria. Also, there is a dearth of information comparing experiences of GBV between staff and students of tertiary educational institution in Nigeria. This study is designed to examine experience of genderbased violence among female staff of a Nigeria university. It will provide vital information about experiences of genderbased violence among staff and students of a university in Nigeria.

### **METHODS**

Descriptive research design was adopted quantitative approach using collection. Participants were recruited using multiple sampling methods. Sample from the student population was selected from 10 randomly selected faculties out of the 13 in the University. From each of the faculties, two departments were randomly selected (except for faculty of law, where there is only one undergraduate programme). The total number of female students in each of the faculties was determined and a proportion commensurate to the size of each faculty in the total students' populations wascalculated and selected. For the sample among female staff, three (3) faculties (Basic Medical Sciences, Pharmacy, and Science) and six units (Registry, Bursary, Medical and Health Centre, Security and Division of Students Affair) were randomly selected using simple ballot system. In all 825 female staff and students participated in the study comprising 751 students, 64 non- academic staff and 10 academic staff.

The instrument developed by the researchers data collect was a structured questionnaire. The instrument was given to expert in relevant field to establish face and content validity. Ambiguous questions were restructured and irrelevant questions removed. The questionnaire has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.84 and adjudged reliable. The questionnaire has three parts covering the socio-demographic characteristics of participants, perception of gender-based violence, and experiences of various forms of genderbased violence. The section on perception had 38 items to which participants agreed or

disagreed with identified behaviour constituting gender-based violence. The section on experiences had 20 behaviour indicating GBV to which participants gave information if they experienced such in the past, were experiencing such at the time of conducting the study or never had the experiences. Informed consent was taken participants that eventually participated in the study. Permission was also sought and gained from the ethical committee of the university. Data collected was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean and standard deviation) were used for data analyses.

## **RESULTS**

Socio-demographic variables of the participants as presented in table 1 showsthat 73.4% and 70.0% for non-academic and academic staff respectively were married as against only 4% for students. This was definitely due to the fact that they are older people among the staff than the students. Yoruba ethnic group dominated the three categories, this cannot be separated from the fact that Ile-Ife where the study was conducted is dominated by the Yorubas. As may be expected educational qualification shows that the staff have higher degree than the students.

The mean age for students was found to be 20.02±3.33 years while that of non-academic and academic staff were 39.25±10.69 years and 31.60±5.62 years respectively. The monthly income of the academic staff was also observed to be higher than that of non-academic staff; this is because academic staffs comprise majorly

of the senior staff while non-academic is made up of both senior and junior staff and also academic staff are better ranked in the scheme of service than their non-academic counterpart. For students however, theirmean of their monthly allowance was 12,064 Naira.

There was little difference by proportion of the number of participants in each category that correctly perceived gender-based violence. Across the three categories there were participants who did not correctly perceive some of the behaviours listed as violence when such are actually recognized as GBV.

Participants' experiences of different forms of gender-based violence are as presented in table 4 with table 5 reflecting such experiences as were in their past and at the time of study. Results from the table showed that 10.9% of the participants has been dispossessed of a property in the past while 1.2 % are currently been dispossessed of a property. Also, 8.7% of the participants have been taken advantage of sexually in thepast, 7.8% have been forced to have sexual intercourse by a man against their wish, 4.4% were forced to have sexual intercourse by their boyfriend/fiancé, 2.7% have been forced by their husband to have sexual intercourse and this gives 26.2% of the participants that were married.

Findings from this study also shows that 29.2 % of the students have been violated one way on the other in their life while 7.65 are currently been violated as against 39.1 ofnon-academic staff that have been violated in the past (see table 5).

#### DISCUSSION

This study showed that majority of the participants did not correctly perceived gender-based violence across all the three categories of participants contrary to what may be expected especially when one considers their social placement in a university setting. One would have expected that high percentage of participants even across categories would have better perception in the light of series of sensitization and advocacy programmes by one of the organs of the University and on various media (electronic, print and social) on GBV.

Importantly, women are the most affectedby GBV and poor perception of what constitute GBV would imply continuous tolerance and perpetuation of GBV underthe purview of women even in an academic environment. All interventions therefore, without first correcting women's andsocietal perception and attitude to violence and gender-based violence might not yield the required result. Many women still believe that violence is a normal part of family life and in all relationships and women should go through such in any intimate relationship. In this study some of the participants across all the categories believed that a man has the right to beat his wife as was also reported in the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), in Egypt where it was found out that 69% of the women believed that the man has theright to beat his wife if she offends and if she denies him sexual intercourse<sup>15</sup>. Similar findings in Ghana as reported by Ghana Demographic Health and Survey 2014showed that 33% women believed the

husband is justified to beat the wife if she denies him sexual intercourse<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, about half of the students believed that violence between a man and a woman is a private affair; this is similar to the findings of a study carried out among women in southeastern Nigeria to assess their perception and experience of gender-based violence<sup>9</sup>. Researchers have concluded that victims of gender-based violence usually view their experiences of gender-based violence as private affair<sup>9</sup>.

Previous scholars had documented different level of gender-based violence among women in Nigeria<sup>1,17–19</sup>. This is further corroborated by submissions of this study as most of the women that participated had experienced one form of violence or the other. Various form of violence that women in this study had experienced ranges from been dispossessed of their properties; taken advantage of her sexually; forced to have sexual intercourse by a man against their wish; forced to have sex by their boyfriend/fiancé; forced by their husband to have sexual intercourse; unwanted sexual advances have been made towards<sup>17,18</sup>.

The percentage of participants in this study that had been involved or violated sexually in one way or the other is closely related to 13% prevalence rate that had been previously documented in Nigeria<sup>17,20</sup>. It was concluded in a study that women in academics are at risk of gender-based violence, this is further confirmed by the result of this study<sup>21</sup>. The most commonly experienced form of violence among the participants in this study was being dispossessed of their property; followed by being made object of unwanted sexual

advances by opposite sex. Although the prevalence of sexual violence among participants in this study is high, the rate is lower than the 9.6% and 11.9% prevalence rates of rape among students in public and private secondary schools respectively in Ilorin as earlier documented<sup>2</sup>. Finding from this study is within these range also. Religion is a strong basis for many tolerated behaviour and prescription in family and intimate relationship in Africa<sup>22</sup>. Though religion was not a parameter used in analyzing perception and experiences of GBV in this study, it is also important to note that majority of the participants in this study were Christians (88.48%) and 11.4% were Muslim. Christianity and Islam are the two mostly practiced religions in Nigeria and thus become a mediating factor that should be a point of reference in moderating change. In a similar study among students from private and public secondary school in Ilorin Nigeria, prevalence of physicalviolence was reported to be high<sup>2</sup>. Experiences of physical violence among women in our study was however found tobe lower than what was documented by previous researchers<sup>2</sup>.

Other forms of violence experienced by participants in our study include been deprived of their inheritance and been insulted by men in intimate relationship which also contribute to economic and emotional violence. Some of the emotional violence experienced by the participants in this study was found to include differential negative treatment compared to their male counterpart; been criticized by their boyfriends/fiancés/husbands; been and threatened by their boyfriends/fiancés/

husbands. The prevalence of emotional violence among the sample population in this study was found to be lower than what was documented in Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018 and previous study<sup>10,23</sup>. Emotional violence, though may not be seen physically, is a major factor in determining the mental health status and may be contributing to the high prevalence of depression in women.

A study has shown that one in every four women in Nigeria in their lifetime experienced gender-based violence, this is similar to what we found out in this study<sup>1</sup>. The result showed that across the three categories of participants in this study, one in every three participants had experienced GBV at a point in time either in the past or at the time of the study. Among the three categories of women examined, gender-based violence was found to be more among the academic staff, followed by the non-academic staff while the least was observed to be among the students.

Earlier. researchers reported 43.3% prevalence rate of gender-based violence in Nigeria and 67.7% in Ethiopia<sup>24</sup>. In a study among university students in Uganda, it was found out that 33.1% of students in their study reported having had some experience of sexual coercion in the past<sup>25</sup>. All these observations point to the critical and urgent need for active, continuous and consistent interventions focusing on surveillance, education, mobilization, counseling and support for women across board irrespective of age, educational and social status. Importantly, the university and educational settings are good places to mobilize bothmen and women to drive behavioural change

especially as this relates to reducing the burden of GBV.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon of epidemic proportions that had been found to be prevalent in many societies. Our study found out that women have incorrect perception of gender-based violence and had been exposed to different forms of gender-based violence ranging from physical to emotional and sexual violence. Sexual violence was found to be more among the participants in this study. This study established that one out of every three women had been violated one way or the other in their life time.

TABLES

Table 1 Summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants by their categories.

| Variables          |                    | Students  |       | Non-Academic<br>Staff |         | Academic Staff |         |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------|-----------------------|---------|----------------|---------|
|                    |                    | N=751     | %     | N= 64                 | %       | N=10           | %       |
| Marital            | Married            | 30        | 4.0   | 47                    | 73.4    | 7              | 70.0    |
| Status             | Single             | 719       | 95.7  | 9                     | 14.1    | 3              | 30.0    |
|                    | Divorced/separated | 2         | 0.3   | 3                     | 4.7     | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | Widowed            | 0         | 0.0   | 5                     | 7.8     | 0              | 0.0     |
| Ethnicity          | Yoruba             | 644       | 85.8  | 53                    | 82.8    | 9              | 90.0    |
|                    | Hausa              | 10        | 1.3   | 2                     | 3.1     | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | Igbo               | 43        | 5.7   | 7                     | 10.9    | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | Ijaw               | 16        | 2.1   | 1                     | 1.6     | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | Others             | 38        | 5.1   | 1                     | 1.6     | 1              | 10.0    |
| Religion           | Christianity       | 663       | 88.3  | 57                    | 89.1    | 10             | 100     |
|                    | Islam              | 87        | 11.6  | 7                     | 10.9    | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | Traditional        | 1         | 0.1   | 0                     | 0.0     | 0              | 0.0     |
| <b>Educational</b> | SSCE               | 552       | 73.5  | 3                     | 4.7     | 0              | 0.0     |
| qualification      | OND                | 85        | 11.3  | 8                     | 12.5    | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | NCE                | 5         | 0.7   | 2                     | 3.1     | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | RN                 | 10        | 1.3   | 1                     | 1.6     | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | HND                | 7         | 0.9   | 14                    | 21.9    | 0              | 0.0     |
|                    | First Degree       | 88        | 11.7  | 25                    | 39.1    | 3              | 30.0    |
|                    | Masters            | 4         | 0.5   | 9                     | 14.1    | 7              | 70.0    |
|                    | PhD                | 0         | 0.0   | 2                     | 3.1     | 0              | 0.0     |
| Age                | Mean               | 22        | .02   | 39.25                 |         | 31.60          |         |
|                    | Std. Deviation     | 3.        | 3.33  |                       | 10.69   |                | 5.62    |
|                    | Range              | 30        |       | 40.00                 |         | 16.00          |         |
| Age At             | Mean               | 25.53     |       | 26.21                 |         | 24.71          |         |
| marriage           | Std. Deviation     | 3.36      |       | 4.55                  |         | 7.34           |         |
| _                  | Range              | 11        |       | 26.00                 |         | 20             |         |
| Monthly            | Mean               | 12,064.90 |       | 81,742.70             |         | 129,600.00     |         |
| income             | Std. Deviation     | 12,95     | 50.94 | 74,506.59             |         | 1.334.45       |         |
| /allowance         | Range              |           | 00.00 |                       | ,000.00 | 450            | ,000.00 |

**Table 2:** Participants` Perception of GBV by Categories

| _                    | Students |      | Non-academic Staff |      | Academi | c Staff |
|----------------------|----------|------|--------------------|------|---------|---------|
|                      | Fr %     |      | Fr                 | %    | Fr      | %       |
|                      | N = 751  |      | N = 64             |      | N = 10  |         |
| Incorrect perception | 435      | 57.9 | 36                 | 56.2 | 5       | 50.0    |
| Correct perception   | 316      | 42.1 | 28                 | 43.8 | 5       | 50.0    |

Table 3: Perception of participants about some practices and beliefs

|   | Studen | nts N= 751 | Non-Academic Staff<br>N= 64 |           |        | emic Staff<br>= 10 |
|---|--------|------------|-----------------------------|-----------|--------|--------------------|
|   | Agreed | Disagreed  | Agreed                      | Disagreed | Agreed | Disagreed          |
| Violence between a man and a                  | 49.5%  | 50.5%      | 34.4%                       | 65.6%     | 30.0%  | 70.0%              |
| woman is a private affair                     | (372)  | (379)      | (22)                        | (42)      | (3)    | (7)                |
| As the head of the family the                 | 28.8%  | 71.2%      | 23.4%                       | 76.6%     | 20.0%  | 80.0%              |
| man has the right to beat his wife            | (216)  | (535)      | (15)                        | (49)      | (2)    | (8)                |
| It is culturally acceptable for               | 28.4%  | 71.6%      | 21.9%                       | 78.1%     | 20.0%  | 80.0%              |
| the man to beat his wife                      | (213)  | (538)      | (14)                        | (50)      | (2)    | (8)                |
| A good way for a woman to                     | 29.3%  | 70.7%      | 28.1%                       | 71.9%     | 20.0%  | 80.0%              |
| punish her husband whenever                   | (220)  | (531)      | (18)                        | (46)      | (2)    | (8)                |
| he offends her is to refuse him sex           |        |            |                             |           |        |                    |
| Females provoke sexual abuse                  | 47.3%  | 52.3%      | 35.9%                       | 64.1%     | 50.0%  | 50.0               |
| through their inappropriate                   | (358)  | (393)      | (23)                        | (41)      | (5)    | (5)                |
| Behaviour                                     |        |            |                             |           |        |                    |
| It is wrong for a woman to                    | 66.2%  | 33.8%      | 57.8%                       | 42.2%     | 60.0%  | 40.0%              |
| deny her husband sex                          | (497)  | (254)      | (37)                        | (27)      | (6)    | (4)                |
| Women are created to be under                 | 57.7%  | 42.3%      | 51.6%                       | 48.4%     | 30.0%  | 70.0               |
| a man. Hence, should be controlled by the man | (433)  | (318)      | (33)                        | (31)      | (3)    | (7)                |

Table 4: Participants` experiences of Gender-based Violence

|   | Experience of GBV |           |            |  |
|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|--|
| Experiences   | Past              | Currently | Never      |  |
| Being dispossessed of a property                        | 10.9 (90)         | 1.2 (10)  | 87.9 (725) |  |
| Being deprived of an inheritance                        | 5.3 (44)          | 2.2 (18)  | 92.5 (763) |  |
| Accused of witchcraft.                                  | 4.6 (38)          | 0.4(3)    | 95.0 (784) |  |
| Being taken advantage of sexually                       | 8.7 (72)          | 1.0(8)    | 90.3 (745) |  |
| Forced to have sex against my wish                      | 7.8 (64)          | 1.3 (11)  | 90.9 (750) |  |
| Been made an object of unwanted sexual advances         | 10.5 (87)         | 1.9 (16)  | 87.5 (722) |  |
| My husband predicament being attributed to me.          | 1.9 (16)          | 1.3 (11)  | 96.7 (798) |  |
| Beaten during pregnancy by my spouse (including hitting | 1.3 (11)          | 0.5 (4)   | 98.2 (810) |  |
| and slapping)   |                   |           |            |  |
| Beaten by my husband (including hitting and slapping)   | 2.2 18)           | 0.4(3)    | 97.5 (804) |  |
| Beaten by my boyfriend/fiancé (including hitting and    | 4.2 (35)          | 0.6 (5)   | 95.2 (785) |  |
| slapping)   |                   |           |            |  |
| Differential treatment as a female child (negative)     | 6.9 (57)          | 2.5 (21)  | 90.5 (747) |  |
| Being threatened by my husband                          | 2.9 (24)          | 0.7 (6)   | 96.4 (795) |  |
| Being threatened by my boyfriend/fiancé                 | 6.7 (55)          | 1.6 (13)  | 91.8 (757) |  |
| Forced by my boyfriend/fiancé to have sex               | 4.4 (36)          | 1.1 (9)   | 94.5 (780) |  |
| Forced by my husband to have sex                        | 2.7 (22)          | 0.8 (7)   | 96.5 (796) |  |
| Criticized by my husband                                | 3.3 (27)          | 1.6 (13)  | 95.2 (785) |  |
| Criticized by my boyfriend/fiancé                       | 8.5 (70)          | 2.7 (22)  | 88.8 (733) |  |
| Insulted by my husband                                  | 4.0 (33)          | 1.1 (9)   | 94.9 (783) |  |

Table 5: Currency of experiences of one form of violence or the other

|              | Students  |         | Non-Acade | emic Staff | Academic staff |         |
|--------------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|----------------|---------|
| Experiences  | Frequency | Percent | Frequency | Percent    | Frequency      | Percent |
| of GBV       | N = 751   |         | N=64      |            | N = 10         |         |
| Previously   | 219       | 29.2    | 25        | 39.1       | 6              | 60.0    |
| Experienced  |           |         |           |            |                |         |
| Currently    | 57        | 7.6     | 11        | 17.2       | 0              | 0.0     |
| experiencing |           |         |           |            |                |         |
| Never        | 475       | 63.2    | 28        | 43.8       | 4              | 40.0    |
| Experience   |           |         |           |            |                |         |

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