

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION FOR THE VULNERABLE SEX: EVIDENCE FROM RURAL SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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Violence against children is one of the violations of human rights. Although studies have been done on sexual violence against female children, there are gaps in understanding of this phenomenon particularly in Nigeria. Conducted in Ngwo, a rural community in Enugu State, South-eastern Nigeria, the study presents evidence on the reality and extent of violence experienced by the girl-child in this setting. Findings revealed that sexual violence in this area and typically goes unreported. It was also found that knowledge of sexuality education was lacking in breadth and depth. Although more studies are needed to associate lack of sexuality education and experiences of sexual violence, the study concludes that female children are highly vulnerable to sexual violence. We suggest that comprehensive sexuality education can be an important factor in curbing sexual violence. Together with increased awareness and advocacy that target parents, teachers and the society at large, governmental intervention with regards to adequate sanction for perpetrators, introduction of structures for reporting sexual violence and rehabilitation of victims of sexual violence are also critical to dealing with this problem.

Background

Worldwide, sexual violence is one of the widespread abuses against women and girls that affect one-third of them in their life-time (UN Secretary, 2006). It is another leading cause of death after infectious and parasitic diseases (WHO, 2014). UNHR (2014:1) defines sexual violence as:

a form of gender-based violence and encompasses any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of

their relationship to the victim, in any setting. Sexual violence takes multiple forms and includes rape, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, trafficking, sexual enslavement, forced circumcision, castration and forced nudity.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the characteristic lack of sexuality education, which ideally should be an integral aspect of education effectively and appropriately taught to young people, particularly, female children, who are at a greater risk of experiencing sexual violence (ISERT, 2014). However, in some cultures, there is no consensus on the expediency of and appropriate constituents of sexuality education in Nigeria. This reality cuts across various divides or strata in the society. Some parents view it as a profane discussion (Nwokocha & Taiwo 2012), and in schools, some teachers shy away from discussing issues on sexuality. When issues on sexuality are hardly broached, this impacts negatively on female children (Ogunjuyigbe & Adepoju 2014; Isiugo-Abanihe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2007; Woody, 2001; Blakey & Frankland, 1996).

Sexuality education should emphatically be seen as a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information, formation of positive attitudes, beliefs and values as well as development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual aspect of human sexuality. The benefits of sexuality education among others includes its ability to promote sexual health by providing young people with the opportunities to develop a positive and factual view of sexuality, acquire the information and skills they need to take care of their sexual health, including preventing HIV/AIDS, respect and value themselves and others and above all acquire the skills needed to make healthy decisions about their sexual health and behaviour (NERDC 2001). Graham (1977) defined sexuality education as the acquisition of knowledge, values and sexual skills which expose the individual to knowledge about sexuality and sexual behaviour. It relates to teachings on sex, relationships, skills and values that will help young people become knowledgeable of their reproductive and sexual rights and health, while using them appropriately through proper decision-making. It revolves around health and sexuality. It is an important aspect of socialization of the girl-child.

Schneewind (2001) referred sexuality education as the process of acquiring ideas, beliefs, values, shared cultural symbols, meanings and codes of conduct. Sexuality education goes beyond sex talks to issues of biology, gender roles, body image and inter-personal relationships, thoughts, beliefs, values, attitudes, feelings, and sexual behaviours. It also includes personal skills (e.g. decision-making, assertiveness, finding help, negotiation, communication, values, self-esteem, etc.) and sexual health (such as prevention of unwanted pregnancy, sexual abuse, reproductive health, etc.) (NERDC, 2001). Thus, lack of proper sexuality education is evident in the lives of young children either as perpetrators or victims.

It is erroneously believed that ignorance of the subject-matter will make the girl-child stay chaste. Yet, the girl-child is increasingly abused, molested and threatened. Some of them ignorantly explore risky sexual behaviour, lacking negotiation skills, and the necessary self-esteem to combat abuse and deception (Nwokocha & Taiwo, 2012). Although boys experience violence, however, the centrality of the topic on the girl-child has been regarded as important as girls bear a disproportionate burden of experiences of sexual violence compared to their male counterparts (Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade, 2012). Sexual discrimination and violence against the girl-child is a global focus and was taken as a priority theme in the fifty-first session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women held in 2007 (26 February-7 March) on the theme "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child".

United Nations Children's Fund (UNCF) (2014) and UNICEF (2009) stated that violence could take many forms including physical, sexual and emotional violence. To overcome these, young people, particularly the girl-child (who bears the disproportionate burden of violence) must be empowered with the right and adequate knowledge, skills and resources through sexuality education. This will help them make the right decisions, build self-esteem, communicate and negotiate effectively, solve problems as a team or with co-operation, be assertive and acquire coping strategies in the event of violence. The WHO (2014) reported that among girls age 10 and 19, violence was the second leading cause of death after infectious and parasitic diseases. This risk increased all through adolescence. In 2012, deaths from violence among the

girls aged 10-14 was 11,000 or 4 per 100,000. This was even higher among girls aged 15 to 19 with 44,000 victims or 15 per 100,000.

The General Comment No 13 of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011) enlisted forms of physical violence as fatal and non-fatal, physical torture, cruel and inhuman physical punishment, physical bullying, hazing and corporal punishments. Some of these include burning, spanking, choking, burning, punching, kicking, slapping, and so on. UNCF (2014) stated that physical violence, mainly corporal punishments usually take place under the pretext of discipline, mainly at home, by parents or caregivers. Bullying which usually involves the use of aggression to assert power or command obedience is done with a hostile intent, either verbally or physically expressed, repeated over time and causes distress for the victim, usually in psychological or relational forms (Farrington & Baldry, 2010; Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009; Rigby, 2005; Pepler & Craig, 2000; Olweus, 1991).

For this study, the girl-child is regarded as a female below the age of 18 years. This is in consonance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2001) definition of a child as a person under the age of 18 years. The term vulnerable sex is operationally regarded so for younger girls because of the nature of their physical fragility to defend themselves compared to boys, their emotional nature which makes them to be seen as "supposedly weak" and the patriarchal nature of Nigeria which to some extent does not favour women. Thus, the paper investigated sexual violence and sexuality education for the vulnerable sex in a rural south-eastern Nigeria by specifically exploring the extent of the experiences of sexual violence against the girl-child (the vulnerable sex) in the study area- Ngwo Enugu State; it assessed their knowledge of sexuality education, discussing known forms of violence and examining the effect of violence and lack of sexuality education on them.

The Problem

Most gender-based violence is perpetrated by intimate partners, caregivers, peers or relative, and takes place in schools, at home or other places young people are assumed to be safe. So many cases go unreported because of fear of labelling, stigmatization or threat to life (Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade 2012; UNICEF, 2010;

UNICEF, 2009; Ikechebelu et al., 2008; Udegbe and Omololu, 1994). Some victims are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases/ infections (STDs/STIs), vesico-vagina fistula (VVF), unwanted pregnancy, drop outs in schools, low self-esteem, psychological and emotional instability, reduced life chances; inability to earn viable income, and a tendency to become an abuser (UNICEF, 2014; UNICEF, 2009; Udegbe and Omololu, 1994).

In curbing violence against the girl-child, schools and homes can be a place to inculcate norms of gender equality and promotion of rights through sexuality education. Yet, in most low and middle income countries, low levels of acceptance and teaching of the subject-matter have been observed by various studies such as ISERT (2014) and UNESCO (2014). At the domestic or home level, some parents find it difficult to have sex talks with their children and others feel it is immoral. When some of them do so, they do it by proxy (Nwokocha & Taiwo 2012). This is a reflection of deep-seated ignorance on the importance of the subject-matter by parents/guardians. Often, what parents fail to teach their children, their peers or the society teaches them, often passing the wrong or incorrect information to them.

Cultural beliefs and public attitude about sexuality create barriers for proper sexuality education (ISERT, 2014). Indeed, in the past, folks were bonded deeply by traditional values but these became eroded with modernization. Hence, the need for an alternative means of instilling values for both boys and girls generally. However, most forms of sexual socialization are employed through nagging, threats and warnings which do not generally empower them but dent their self-esteem (Nwokocha and Taiwo, 2012). The majority of girls are also unaware of some negotiation skills, assertiveness and tactics used by males to solicit for sex such as crying, buying gifts, kneeling, pleading, and so on. Moreover, they find it difficult to confide in older ones for fear of stigmatization or labeling. Most often, their gender as female present its own vulnerability and sometimes used as an object of intimidation (UNICEF, 2010). In Nigeria, gender socialization sometimes entails that women be submissive and docile, thus penetrating into their life experiences such that they feel helpless and defenseless as a result of the ideas of "masculinity" and "femininity" imprinted in their minds from childhood.

Corroborating this notion, being masculine among boys is perceived through sexual conquests and repeated sexually transmitted infections (Varga, 2003), and in Jamaica, a boy feels entitled to having sex with a girl if he spends a lot of money on her (Eggleston, Jackson & Hardee, 1999). Consequently, these children become victims of reproductive health mishaps such as STDs/STIs, unplanned pregnancies, early marriage and early childbearing, abortion, mortality, decreased life chances like educational attainment and economic opportunities, and so on. (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014; Nwokocha & Taiwo, 2012; Nwokocha & Taiwo, 2012; Nwokocha, 2011; UNICEF, 2005).

Method

The study adopted the qualitative approach using in-depth interviews. Respondents were purposively chosen and the number of interviewees was guided by theoretical saturation (cf. Strauss & Corbin 1998). That is, interviews were discontinued when responses from participants were observed to be repetitive. The study was conducted in Ngwo, a rural area in Enugu State, Nigeria, a location from which there is little or no information about the girl-child's experiences of violence. Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain detailed information from the participants. The study adhered to ethical principles of confidentiality, voluntariness, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and the right to withdraw from participation at any point in the interview. Permission to conduct interviews among the girls were sought from the school management. The purpose of the study was also disclosed to the participants and opportunities were given to them to ask questions regarding the study. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated, and the data were subjected to a content analysis.

Findings

Fifteen subjects participated in the study. They were between the ages of 11 and 17, with mean age of 15.7. The participants were students in secondary schools (Junior Class – 4; Senior Class- 11). Eleven of them were of Igbo origin which is not surprising as the study was conducted in south-eastern Nigeria which inhabits mainly the Igbos. More than half have heard of what they

perceived to be sexuality education from various sources but mainly from their mothers and teachers in school. The sources were: Mother (5); Friends (2); Teachers (4); Health worker (1) and Corps member (1). All the respondents had experienced at least one or more forms of violence, with sexual violence been prevalent among majority and mainly perpetrated by relatives and friends/neighbors.

Experiencing Sexual Violence

The majority (11) of the girls reported having experienced sexual violence. Most of them had not previously disclosed their experiences because they could not confide in anyone.

One of the girls narrated her experience:

A friend of mine attempted to rape me. Thank God I escaped but sustained a deep cut from a broken glass in his room while I struggled. He had lured me to come and pick something in his house. After the incident, I did not tell anyone. In fact, you are the first person I am speaking to concerning that because of the way you approached me (IDI/Girl/15 years/2018).

Most times, the victims were threatened, even with death, if they dared to report the incidence to anyone. Narrating her ordeal from her biological father, a participant said:

My father raped me twice at age 7 and 9 without any protection. When he did that, he told me not to tell anyone and that he would kill me if I did. I was so afraid and couldn't tell anyone including my mother. But one day, my mother sent me to go and collect something from our relative living close to us. When I got there, my aunty noticed how I was walking. She asked me if I had injury on my leg but I said no. she insisted to know what was wrong with me but I was afraid of telling her because of what my father may do to me if he finds out. She drew me closer to herself and assured me of confidence and help. I told her my father had sex with me. She held me, cried and screamed. She immediately sent for my mother who was at her work place. My mother did not know what happened. She thought one of my siblings beat me. She begged me to tell her what the problem was and reminded me that I'm her only daughter. I finally opened up to her. She screamed

and cried. She asked me how many times he did that to me and I told her twice and that the second one took place the previous night. I was so afraid. I felt devastated. I was crying. I was confused. The thought of what my father could do to me filled my mind. My mother then took me to the hospital. The doctor initially doubted but then confirmed it. My mother felt helpless. I was then tested for HIV and STDs. I tested negative for HIV but positive for STDs. I thank God. Although my father is HIV positive, I did not get it. Now, my father is in prison because my mother reported to her parents and relatives who then took it up and reported to the police... Ordinarily, I know my mother may not have reported to the police without involving her people and the elders first. She may also have kept it within the family alone so that I will not be insulted or gossiped about (IDI/girl/11years/2018).

While the above statement gives hopeful scenarios of how perpetrators of sexual violence can be brought to book, the harmful effects of being sexually violated as reflected in the contraction of sexual transmitted infection and risk of being HIV-infected cannot be swept under the carpet. Again, the inability of the victim to expose the perpetrator because of threats and feeling of disempowerment experienced by the girl-child is also a matter to be concerned about. But for the observant, without sensitive and skillful intervention of the victim's aunty and support of family members, such perpetrator would have been roaming freely around the streets as the victim would have kept it to herself.

Some of the victims did not only experience psychological trauma but also got pregnant and was about to drop out of school as a result of sexual violence. A respondent said:

In few months, I will become a mother. My brother's friend raped me and got me pregnant. The man is married with kids, yet, he raped me. Now, I am about to drop out of school when I should be preparing for my West Africa Certificate Examinations (WAEC) in a few years. When it happened, I was afraid to tell my grandmother who I live with (My mother is late). When my uncle and grandmother found out, they did nothing, not even to report to the police because they want to protect me from shame. I regret the incidence. I feel depressed

for my unplanned motherhood and for dropping out of school. I wish my uncle never sent me to his friend's house to pick something for him (IDI/girl/17years/2018).

While the result of this experience contradicts the first, the supposed concerns about keeping sexual violence secret among family members in order to protect the girl-child from embarrassment has aggravated the prevalence of this harmful act and ruined the lives of many victims.

Sexual violence also manifested itself in form of unsolicited and unwanted touch and takes place where the girl-child was perceived to be safe especially with siblings or close relatives. Most of these kinds of incidence are usually covered up and the location of the perpetrator or victim changed. Perpetrated by a biological brother, a respondent reported thus:

My biological brother attempted to rape me. I was lying in my room at night. He came in and began talking with me. In a short while, he made his way into private part and wanted to have sex with me. I screamed and my parents rushed into my room. They almost disowned him but later forgave him and sent him to live in another State (IDI/girl/16years/2018).

While friends and neighbors also perpetrated acts of sexual violence, these were typically not reported often to shield the girl-child from public scrutiny or shame, or as a result of fear on the part of the victims especially when they had been threatened or when the perpetrators are cultists. On this note, a respondent disclosed:

A guy attempted to rape me. On another occasion, he slapped and beat me up. I did not tell my parents because I do not want any trouble. The guy is a cultist and he has bad friends. He may hurt my people if I report him (IDI/Girl/15years/2018).

Some also reported emotional violence mainly in the form of labeling, threats, humiliation and spiting. The respondents who experienced these reported being labeled "*ashawo*" (prostitute). They expressed how deeply they were hurt and ashamed by the incident perpetrated against them. Another participant said, "*My friends were calling me prostitute after they heard about my ordeal which was not my fault*" (IDI/girl/16years/2018).

The study accidentally discovered (serendipity) what the authors termed perceived lessons. Sometimes, victims justified their experiences of violence and often blamed themselves for the occurrence. Surprisingly, some of the respondents expressed that their experience of violence taught them some lessons which they would never have learnt. For instance: *“My experience has taught me to comport myself and become more careful with guys. If I didn’t go through that, I would not have learnt this”* (IDI/girl/14years/2018). This scenario of justifying violence even by the victims themselves leaves one wondering if indeed the perpetrators were justified in carrying out such abuses against them. This increasingly calls for sensitization both for perpetrators to stop the heinous act and for the victim to desist from blaming themselves or justifying their experiences but take appropriate and bold steps to bring perpetrators to book.

Knowledge of Sexuality Education

Respondents’ knowledge of sexuality education was examined during the interview. More than half of the respondents agreed that they have been apprised of sexuality education, mostly by mothers, teacher and friends. However, the contents of the instruction they received left much to be desired. Several themes in sexuality education were missing out including knowledge of the body, assertiveness, negotiation and other life skills. Whereas most content of sexuality education especially from mothers included avoiding sex with males in order not to get pregnant and be denied, being oneself, not allowing a male’s touch etc. For example, some participants said:

“Sexuality education is simply a teaching on how to avoid sexual intercourse between a male and a female” (IDI/Girl/17years/2018).

“My mum told me to avoid guys so I don’t get pregnant. That is all.” (IDI/Girl/14years/2018).

“My mother told me that I should be myself and abstain from sex. She also told me not to allow anyone touch me no matter what they promise” (IDI/Girl/13years/2018).

“My mother told me that I may get pregnant if I allow a boy to

touch me. I have also seen the effect of her advice on some girls that got pregnant for their boyfriends. Their boyfriends denied them” (IDI/Girl/17years/2018).

“My mother told me to be careful with guys and not to succumb to their quest for relationship because they could get me pregnant and run away or deny me” (IDI/Girl/15years/2018).

To these parents, the idea of sexuality education was simply all about sexual intercourse and avoiding the opposite sex. This shows the extent of negativities and fear that accompany the topic. Further, sexuality education was sometimes equated with public demeanor. This is evident from another respondent who said:

“My mother taught me how to package myself as a female. She told me that as a woman, I must know how to sit down in the public and how to react. She also advised me not to be close to men. She said I should be far away from them and always respect myself as a woman” (IDI/Girl/16years/2018).

In schools, teachers low comfort level was evident as they tend to present sexuality issues under the disguise of biology and moral lesson. Some would rather shift the responsibility to parents. This is reflected in what a participant said:

My biology teacher taught us about menstruation, respiratory system, etc. She also taught us to be neat when menstruating. She told us that when we are about to enter adolescent age, parents have to call their children to tell them about sex. She also told us to keep ourselves and that God hears the prayers of a virgin more than those who have dis-virgined themselves (IDI/Girl/17years/2018).

On the other hand, good knowledge of the topic by teachers helps to shape teaching of the topic. This calls for the need to train people so they can have the right information and aim for a comprehensive sexuality education. Nearly detailed information came from a trained health worker who visited the study location prior to the study. Although, an aspect of the statement on decent dressing leaves much to be desired as if boys actually have rights to rape girls who supposedly dressed indecently. According to the participant in her narration:

He told us things concerning sex, prevention and how to abstain from it. He also taught us about physical hygiene and how to be clean during our menstrual period. He said we should always bath three times a day and change our pads at least twice a day. He also told us to dress decently so as to avoid been raped. He discussed issues on relationships with us, how we can avoid been raped, how to dress properly and the kind of friends not to keep (IDI/Girl/17years/2018).

While narrating, respondents disclosed the attitude of significant others on sexuality education. The culture of silence, indifference and negative disposition were obvious. It is either that the girl-child is perceived to be too young to know about it or parents/significant others think that silence on the topic would help the children stay chaste. These were aptly captured in what some participants said:

“My aunty feels I’m too young to know” (IDI/girl/15years/2018).

My aunty does not speak to me concerning that. Sometimes, I may even want to ask her some questions but her reactions scare me. She may even scold me or shout at me telling me I was spoilt for asking her such questions. She forgets that I am in school and can easily hear those things (IDI/Girl/15years/2018).

My parents think it is not necessary or maybe I am too young to know. This is not true. They may also think that if they do not tell me, it will make me not to have sex or avoid guys. They do not even know I have a boyfriend and that I have had sex (IDI/Girl/17years/2018).

It is undeniable that when parents/guardians fail to teach their children, the society (peers, social media, etc.) would do, often leading to incorrect information or one that they may become curious about and practice after being influenced by wrong peers who may want to make them feel a sense of belonging.

Effect of Violence and Lack of Sexuality Education

Experiences of violence undeniably filled the victims with emotional trauma, fear, low self-esteem, unstable relationships, dejection and regrets. Some dropped out of school because of pregnancy and early motherhood. One of the respondents said,

I have not been okay. I am still afraid. Since then, I do not go out with most of my friends. Some that heard my ordeal gossip about me. It has really not been easy. When I stand with guys, people will tell them to leave me because I was raped. It makes me feel sad and discriminated against. It is also embarrassing (IDI/girl/17years/2018).

In expressing how the experiences have affected them, they also expressed regrets over not being given the appropriate information. These were some of their expressions:

My mother never told me about sexuality education. If she did, I would have been better able to prevent the incident including my unplanned motherhood (IDI/girl/17years/2018).

I think if my mother talked to me about it, I would have been able to know about it and even tell her when the first one happened (IDI/girl/11years/2018).

Another respondent explained that:

Some teenagers are put in a family way without marriage. Getting pregnant without getting married is a shameful thing. There were two girls I know but are now in the village. One was involved in cultism. She ended up pregnant and the boy denied her. The other one was told by her boyfriend that if she loved him, they should have sex so she can prove her love for him. She yielded and then got pregnant. If they had known something on sexuality education, they would not have been in that condition (IDI/girl/16years/2018).

On the other hand, knowledge of sexuality education was viewed as beneficial. Some participants averred in this manner:

“My parents spoke to me always on sex education and it has really helped me so much. They do not keep vital information from me. I am free with them and they are with me too” (IDI/girl/15years/2018).

“My mother’s advice on sexuality education has helped me. Before she advised me, I never knew anything about relationship. When I entered school, her advice became more profitable...” (IDI/girl/16years/2018).

Discussion of Findings

Violence against the vulnerable sex, especially sexual violence, is a social problem that is treated tangentially and under-reported. This was a major finding which was corroborated with other empirical study on sexual violence such as Udegbe and Omololu (1994). Udegbe and Omololu (1994) also reported that violence was both physically injurious and psychologically traumatic. Such were evident from findings in this study. Furthermore, lack of comprehensive sexuality education is evident in the study location and victims linked such to some of their experiences of sexual violence. As enunciated by Nwokocha and Taiwo (2012), violence mortgages the future not only of the girl-child but also the community. Generally, failure to prioritize this is evident in the high rate of teenage pregnancy in Nigeria as about one million Nigerian teenagers get pregnant yearly (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2011).

Findings indicated that a lot of parents or guardians do not see the need to educate their wards on the subject-matter because they think it is an abomination or a taboo, or even inappropriate. There is also a conflict on the appropriate age in which this education should be impacted and the content of sex education. This corroborates findings by WHO (2011). Nwokocha & Taiwo (2012) equally explained that parents/guardians express outright rejection of discussing the topic among their wards, believing that at the right time, they will learn from their older peers. They often see it as a taboo, thereby, expanding the culture of silence and the erroneous belief that the girl-child is too young for such discussion. Such silence is also an erroneous assumption that ignorance of the topic will help them maintain chastity (Nwokocha, 2010). However, when parents fail to teach their children, they are exposed to dangerous peer education degenerating to experiences of violence. This has been affirmed by other studies (Nwokocha, 2010; Bankole, Biddlecom, Guiella, Singh & Zulu, 2007) which portended that failure to impact sexuality education end up exposing them to dangerous peer influence. The study also noted obscurity of the topic on the part of the teachers either arising from low comfort level, ignorance, lack of information, communication problem, personality issues, etc. This finding corroborates ISERT (2014).

Avoidance of shame, fear, labeling, desire to maintain familial relationship, etc leading to not seeking help or reporting violence,

as found in the study, have also been documented by other studies such as Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade (2012); Ikechebelu, Udigwe, Ezechukwu, Ndinechi & Joe-Ikechebelu, (2008). UNICEF (2009) also affirmed that a lot of violence goes unreported. Ignorantly, parents/guardians who do not report sexual violence especially rape fail to realize that rape or attempted rape is a punishable offence in Nigeria amounting to life or some years in prison. Consequently, the girl-child who is also the victim suffers in silence while the perpetrator goes about freely and sometimes with head raised high. The outcome becomes increase in the rate of violence.

Perpetration of violence may not be far explained from the idea of sexual prowess, negative perception of manhood and masculinity where males perceive themselves as the head and can command submission even forcefully. This attitude is latently entrenched in socialization processes and gender roles from childhood. When they perpetrate violence, they accompany it with threats and intimidation. On this, Ajuwon Olley, Akin-Jimoh & Akintola (2001) reported that it is believed by some males that sex is their right in a relationship, and that they can command it anytime they wish, with punishment or physical force since they perceive themselves as physically stronger. Petersen, Bhana & McKay (2005) also affirmed that sexual conquest is an indication of masculinity. This is however detrimental for the girl-child and thus calls for proper re-orientation on masculinity. As found in the study, there is a dire need for comprehensive sexuality education both for boys and girls. UNESCO (2014) affirmed that if these young ones are to gain knowledge, skills and values necessary to lead healthy and fulfilling lives, then comprehensive sexuality education is critical.

The obvious exclusion of boys from the study is because of the centrality and focus of the study. As also stated by Fawole, Ajuwon & Osungbade (2012), girls are more vulnerable to experiencing violence, especially sexual violence because of their young age, lack of physical strength, lack of experience and lack of authority. Be that as it may, undertaking another study that encompasses both boys and girls would present the reality from another vantage point. Undertaking such may also include a comparative analysis of both the urban and rural.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Saving this vulnerable sex from sexual violence and other forms of violence is needful and urgent as the adverse effect of this prevalent act is not only overwhelming but dangerous for the present and future of our girls. The role of the girl-child for the future of the society is unquestionable as she will become the future care-giver/nurturer as well as procreator. When they continue to experience this ugly incidence, the future lifestyle of the society is in jeopardy. There is need to scale up awareness on the importance of the subject-matter both at home, schools, churches/mosques, media, etc. Parents should be observant, more sensitive to their wards, more patient, friendly and capable of winning their confidence. Both boys and girls should be raised to be collaborators and team players. Galvanizing advocacy is also crucial.

Generally, policy should endeavor to focus on interventions at various levels - for parents, school/teachers and the community as a whole. Parents should be encouraged to get closer to their children and be open on issues on sexuality as the family is the basic unit of the society. They should also be encouraged to report violence. Teachers/peer educators and other relevant professionals must be trained and empowered to get comfortable and knowledgeable about the topic. There is need for youth friendly centres in communities and schools where victims can be assured of confidentiality and where they can report their experiences, so that the law can take its course. Perpetrators of violence must be sanctioned to serve as a detriment to others. All must see the girl-child as a sister, future mother, wives and those who hold the future of the society. All hands must be on deck to save the girl-child and in doing so, salvage the entire society.

“Discrimination and violence destroys the potential of girls and women in developing countries and prevents them from pulling themselves out of poverty.” Andrew Mitchell,

(International Development Secretary, International Women’s Day, 8 March 2012)

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