

Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the Academic and Socio-Economic Well-being of Rural Women in Okrika and Etche Local Government Areas, Rivers State.

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Abstract: The study investigated the effects of Gender Based Violence (GBV) on the Academic and Socio-economic well-being of rural women in Okrika and Etche Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives were to determine the forms of GBV perpetrated or meted to women and the effects of such treatment on their academic and socio-economic well-being. It was a survey study using 300 women respondents systematically sampled to include all stakeholder (students, female teachers, out-of-school females and adult females) especially victims. A structured questionnaire in the pattern of Likert 5-point rating scale was used in gathering the data. Mean statistics and t-test were used in analyzing the data and testing the null hypothesis. The result showed varied forms of abuse or violence against rural women, ranging from verbal and physical attack, emotional and psychological trauma to life threatening ones, such as rape, hostage taking among others. The effect on their academic and socio-economic well-being were enormous and includes loss of self-esteem, risky sexual behaviour, insecure livelihood, disrupted academic pursuit and drop-outs to attempts to take ones life. The null hypothesis tested showed no significant difference in the opinions of Okrika and Etche rural women on the factors considered, with P-value of 0.168 at 0.05% probability level. Recommendations include strong legislation stipulating punitive measures against offenders, proper upbringing of children with emphasis on moral rectitude and effective rehabilitation of victims of GBV including free education to encourage them back to school.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Socio-economic Well-being, Rural area

INTRODUCTION

United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (2010), describes Gender Based Violence (GBV) as any act against women that could result to physical, sexual or psychological assault or suffering, which include and not limited to threats coercion, deprivation of rights and liberty either secretly or publicly. The implication is that in whatever condition GBV is perpetrated, its effects on the victim is total (physical, psychological and emotional) and could manifest to adverse consequences in the child's academic pursuit. The seemingly docility of educational institutions to increase girls participation in school and enhance their educational quality is becoming a cause of worry. Studies by Miske and Van Belle-Prouty [1] and Sey [2] are pointer to this assertion. The scholars expressed concern over the school environment, its curriculum, examination processes and teaching quality in relation to access and participation of girl-child and declared the school suspect. In the opinion of Butler [3], school is a social arena noted for its asymmetrical power relations

enacted through gender, age, authority and other social parameters such as ethnicity, disability and language as fundamentals to the totality of experiences the school can offer a child. Gender identities are not given or achieved without resistance, rather are exercised over a period through individual and collective acts of tolerance and resistance. This was the beginning of gender demarcation observed in educational institutions, thereby given impetus and reinforcing masculine and feminine identities. Therefore an attempt to go beyond the accepted boundaries behaviour-wise is resisted through peer pressure, violence – physical assault, intimidation, verbal abuse, deprivations etc. Schools are meant to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds (social, economic, age, race, class, religion) while pursuing the educational aspirations. A student's background could affect his/her knowledge ability, expectations, attitude, emotion and social intelligence. Efforts to achieve and be on top amidst challenges except great pressure on the student and subsequently affect his behaviour (hostile or docile), making the school environment a breeding ground of

deviant gender attitude with the girls at the receiving end.

UNICEF [4] reported that GBV in schools are of many forms which include; economic (transactional sex), socio-cultural (taboo on sex, lack of sex education, unequal gender relations) and health related. According to the study, it could also be sexual, psychological or physical perpetrated in different forms inside or near the school which even the school are culprits. In schools, the most commonly reported GBV is sexually related. In this context, sexual violence refers to any sexual act committed or attempted, by using force, threat or surprise, such as rape, feeling, exploitation or explicit sexual allusions. This is seconded by physical violence such as corporal punishment or forced labour or any act that could cause discomfort, pain or injury. The psychological dimension of GBV include, insults, threats, neglect, lack of class attention, refusal to correct home work, deprivations, emotional repression, humiliation and dangerous exposure of students to unwholesome acts. WHO [5] reported that a victim of sexual violence expresses the feelings of anxiety and is isolated; which could result to depression, alcoholism and drug addiction and sometimes attempts suicide. In Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi were reports of high sexual aggression in schools by boys which the culprits even went scot-free, including teachers who proposition girls for sex [6, 7]. In Kenya, sexual violence was also high, involving incidences of rape on the way back from school and some teachers indicted of impregnating primary school pupils [8]. Another study by Dunne, et al. [9], about girls' education, shows high level of pregnancy and drop-out among girls. This time sexual violence is not limited to female students alone but rather extended to female teachers. USAID [10] painted a gloomy picture of girls' education in Pakistan. According to the report, girls' access to primary education in rural areas of North-West Pakistan is in jeopardy as female teachers were frequently threatened or assaulted in the villages where they work and are afraid to leave the school after school period.

GBV could be detrimental to the educational attainment of rural women and their general well-being. The benefits of girl-child education especially in the developing nations where women are literally the "beast of burden" in the families shouldering virtually all the domestic activities and ensuring the well-being of her family underscores the need for adequate attention to be given to GBV in a bid to reduce it to the least minimum. Plan [11] asserts that GBV in schools prevent the attainment of gender equality as failure to educate women obviously limits their socio-economic development. The author believes that there is a positive correlation between women's educational attainment and child-health and survival. The psycho-emotional effects of GBV on the girl-child could even be more detrimental to her health and well-being, both in the

present and in the future. Its damaging effects go beyond the victim as an individual, both the family and the society at large. The trauma is felt by the parents whose hopes could be dashed when the girl-child drops out of school as a result of violence. Dunne et al. [9] opined that victims of GBV are at risk of engaging in acts detrimental to their well-being early in life. According to them, a girl who experienced domestic violence or lives in an abusive environment suffers psychologically, cognitively and her interpersonal relationship will change and could be forced to become pregnant. A child who is a victim of violence, or witnessed one, may become withdrawn, anxious or depressed in the other hand. The result is that she may become aggressive and exert enormous control over her younger siblings [12]. On the consequences of GBV on academic attainment of women, Human Right Watch [13] reported that GBV could disrupt the education of the girl-child through absenteeism, frequent changing of schools, and eventual drop-out. According to the report, ridicule by classmates especially taunting by the boys and forms through which GBV is perpetrated could diminish school performance, cause trauma, emotional or behavioural disorder and risk to health.

The underlining effects of GBV on the girl-child education and well-being of women as reported by UNICEF [14] include prevention from accessing and receiving quality education and being respected in the society. Manifested through high level of school drop-outs, resulting from lost of motivation and the unwillingness of victims going back to school. In Nigeria, about 80% of female students who dropped out in post-primary schools blamed their inability to successfully complete and achieve their academic aspirations on GBV in schools though this might be hypothetical. When a woman is not educated, she is uninformed and lacks the capacity to carter for herself and that of her family; hence her well-being will be negatively affected. Well-being is peace mind, it is good health, and it is belonging to a community. It is safety, freedom of choice and actions; it is dependable livelihood and steady source of income and quality food [15]. These indices could be achievable through the attainment of quality education, not only by women but even men. However, when one particular sex group is denied the opportunity due to violence, their possible achievement becomes a case study. More especially, in rural area of developing nations where other factors, such as infrastructure and other public utilities and culture constrain the girl-child from becoming educated. That makes such a study in Okrika and Etch Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria pertinent.

Purpose of the Study:

The purposes of the study include to:

- Determine the forms of GBV against women in Okrika and Etche Local Government Areas.

- Determine the effects of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of women in the study areas.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean responses on the effects of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of rural women in Okrika and Etche Local Government areas.

Methodology

The study was carried out in two predominantly rural Local Government Areas of Rivers State (Okrika and Etche). Combined, women population was estimated to about two hundred and fifty thousand [16]. It was a descriptive survey. Systematic sampling techniques was adopted in selecting respondents which include female students and teachers, out-of-school girls and adult females in the communities who have achieved reasonable level of educational attainment. The essence was to gather data from those who had experienced GBV or witnessed it happen and with good knowledge of its consequences.

A structured questionnaire designed in the pattern of Likert 5-point rating scale of agreement was the instrument used for data collection. Three hundred respondents (women) selected from the two Local Government areas (150 each) supplied the primary data. Data were analyzed using mean statistics and the null hypothesis was tested using t-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of gender based violence against women

Table 1 shows various forms of gender based violence against women and the mean responses recorded from the respondents. The respondents were of the opinion that violence against them varies from the worst to ugly and takes the forms of harassment, abuse, name-calling, bullying and indecent assault with average mean values of 4.07, 4.57, 3.99, 3.99 and 4.37, respectively. The respondents also agreed that women were victims of hostage taking, corporal punishment especially in school environment, sexual harassment including rape, physical attack and incessant threats to life and intimidation, creating unnecessary fear and anxiety with average mean values of 3.73, 4.57, 4.58, 4.42 and 4.78, respectively. Other forms of violence against women by the male folks include torture (emotional and psychological), discrimination, neglect and ridicule, with mean values of 3.97, 3.94 and 4.47, respectively. The finding corroborates that of Leach (2003), that women suffer all manner of violence act in the hands of the male-folks, ranging from intimidation, emotional manipulations, insults, threats, ridicules, physical attack, among others. In whatever form GBV is perpetrated, women are usually at the receiving end, and this inhuman act seems not to be restricted by environment. GBV is carried out in schools against female students and teachers, at home by husbands and relatives, in the markets and shops and in the offices and other working places. The fear is usually heightened with the presence of male partners.

Table-1: Mean responses on the forms perpetrating GBV against women

	Variables	M ₁ -Okrika	M ₂ -Etche	Grand M	Remark
1.	Harassment	4.30	3.84	4.07	Accept
2.	Use of abusive and vulgar words	4.51	4.62	4.57	Accept
3.	Name calling	4.02	3.96	3.99	Accept
4.	Excessive bullying	3.86	4.12	3.99	Accept
5.	Indecent touching and assault	4.20	4.53	4.37	Accept
6.	Hostage taking	3.62	3.83	3.73	Accept
7.	Corporal punishment	4.71	4.42	4.57	Accept
8.	Rape and sexual harassment	4.62	4.54	4.58	Accept
9.	Physical attack	4.31	4.52	4.42	Accept
10.	Threats and intimidation	4.81	4.75	4.78	Accept
11.	Emotional and psychological torture	4.02	3.92	3.97	Accept
12.	Discrimination	3.76	4.12	3.94	Accept
13.	Neglect and ridicule	4.51	4.42	4.47	Accept

Source: Field Survey, 2015

M = Mean responses

M ≥ 3.00 accept, otherwise reject

Effect of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of rural women.

Table 2 shows 20 variables and the mean responses on the effect of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of rural women in the study areas. The variables responded to include; disruption of academic activities and subsequent drop-out,

diminished academic performance, early marriage, physical injuries and bruises. It also include trauma (emotional and psychological), limited socialization, alcoholism and drug addiction, loss of self-esteem and depression; all with mean values of > 3.00. The respondents also agreed that GBV could result to risky sexual behaviour (4.37), death when the violence

become severe (4.57), feelings of guilt (3.97), stigmatization and marginalization (4.05), withdrawal and aggressive life style (3.94) respectively. Other

consequences include insecure livelihood, (4.22), poverty and destitution (4.76), fear (4.72) and uncertainty of life's outcome (3.88) respectively.

Table-2: Respondents' opinion on the effect of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of women.

	Factors	M ₁ -Okrika	M ₂ -Etche	Grand M	Remark
1.	Disrupts academic activities	4.80	4.83	4.82	Accept
2.	Leads to school drop out	4.72	4.68	4.70	Accept
3.	Diminishes academic performance	4.81	4.76	4.79	Accept
4.	Could result to early marriage	3.87	4.01	3.94	Accept
5.	Results to injuries and bruises	4.41	4.45	4.43	Accept
6.	Could result to psychological trauma	3.82	4.02	3.92	Accept
7.	Limits effective socialization	4.41	4.35	4.38	Accept
8.	Victims could take to alcohol or drugs	3.65	4.21	3.99	Accept
9.	Could result to loss of self-esteem	4.72	4.64	4.68	Accept
10.	Victim could be excited and then depressed	3.45	4.12	3.79	Accept
11.	A precursor to risky sexual behaviours	4.32	4.41	4.37	Accept
12.	Severe cases could result to death	4.61	4.53	4.57	Accept
13.	The guilt experienced by victim could last long	3.92	4.01	3.97	Accept
14.	Could result to stigmatization and marginalization	4.12	3.98	4.05	Accept
15.	Victim may be withdrawn and aggressive	3.86	4.01	3.94	Accept
16.	GBV could result to insecure livelihood	4.01	4.42	4.22	Accept
17.	Could lead to poverty and destitution	4.72	4.80	4.76	Accept
18.	Could engender fear among women folk	4.82	4.62	4.72	Accept
19.	Life becomes uncertain	3.84	3.92	3.88	Accept
20.	Victim of GBV could attempt suicide	3.43	3.64	3.54	Accept

Source: Field Survey, 2015

M ≥ 3.00 accept

M < 3.00 reject

The findings are evident of how miserable life could become for women who constantly become victims of GBV. When life becomes uncertain, the victim becomes frustrated and later depressed and this could force the victim contemplate suicide. Social stigmatization and withdrawal are common among victims of rape. In some society's especially rural communities where incidences of rape and other sexual abuses are hardly reported, the victims are left in the cold and could even be blamed for their unfortunate condition. This could result to emotional and psychological trauma.

When girls are incessantly abused and molested, their academic ambitions could be jeopardized as victims could either withdraw from

school or forced to change to another school. Where she eventually drops-out, her ambition is thereby cut short and the effects could be multiple and life threatening, and could even affect her children's well-being. The findings therefore, corroborate the reports of Human Rights Watch [13], and WHO [5] that GBV effects could be multi-dimensional and may culminate into poverty, destitution, fear, insecure livelihood and hopelessness on the part of the victim. It could also result to health challenges.

Test of Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean responses on the effects of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of rural women between Okrika and Etche respondents.

Table-3: T-test result of the difference in mean opinion of respondents between women in Okrika and Etche.

Groups	N	Mean	df	t-cal	t-crit	P-value
Okrika	150	4.09	298	-1.38	1.97	.168
Etche	150	4.16				

*Not significant

Result of the t-test analysis of the hypothesis shows no significant difference in the opinions of respondents on the effect of GBV on the academic and socio-economic well-being of rural women, with a P-value 0.168 at probability level 0.05 at 298 degree of

freedom. The implication is that Okrika and Etche women are faced with similar challenges and experiences, resulting from gender based violence.

CONCLUSION

The following were deduced based on the findings;

- That GBV is common in rural areas where such abuses and assaults were either ignored or go unpunished.
- That GBV is perpetrated in many forms ranging from mere verbal abuses to life threatening and humiliating acts such as rape and other emotional and psychological devastating behaviours.
- That victim of GBV are not age or environmental specific, as both young and old suffer it and it occurs both in schools, homes and even public places.
- That the consequences of GBV are many and great, affecting not only the victim but also her children and dependents and therefore a societal problem.

Recommendations:

The following were recommended;

- There should be a legislation recommending stringent punishment for perpetrators of gender based violence. Such laws and subsequent punishment would deter others from abusing women at will.
- The moral upbringing of children should be emphasized both at home, churches/mosques and complimented by the school. Such sound moral upbringing would discourage male children from engaging in violent acts against women.
- Victims of GBV should be rehabilitated and counseled to face the challenges of life while pushing their ugly experiences behind them.
- Civil rights groups and other stakeholders in the fight against gender discrimination intensify campaign against GBV, while also creating awareness among rural populace on the need to report such abuses to law enforcement agencies.
- School management should take up the task of stamping violence of any form against women in their schools and punishing erring student or teacher to serve as deterrent to others.

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