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Gender Based Violence and Vulnerable Group: The Need for Women Emancipation during and after Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT
Violence Against Women is a gender-based violence, and is a global phenomenon that cuts across all societies, boundaries of age, socio-economic status, education and geography. Yet globally we still do not know very much about its extent. Economic empowerment has long been considered a key component in structural interventions to reduce gender inequality and the experience of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) among women and girls. This paper also takes a critical survey on the recurring of gender-based violence in our society, with specific emphasis on sexual harassment in tertiary institution, a case of University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology in Calabar, Cross River State. A descriptive method was adopted and data was collected via a survey of three hundred and fifty-seven (357) respondents using non-probabilistic sampling techniques. Data collected were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis and t-tests with the aid of statistical package for social science (SPSS). The result of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between gender-based violence and vulnerable group and the need for women emancipation/empowerment. As predicted, the study also revealed that, results from recent studies have yielded inconsistent evidence on the relationship between women's economic empowerment (WEE) interventions and the risk of Gender-based violence, possibly because increase empowerment challenges the status quo in the household, which can result in a male partner using violence to maintain his position. Reciprocally, there is evidence indicating increased empowerment reduces Gender-based violence because educational or financial empowerment offers higher status in the household, which when decreases women's risk of experiencing violence.
Keywords: Gender, Violence, gender based, women emancipation and sexual harassment and vulnerable group.

INTRODUCTION
Violence against Women and Girls is one of the most prevent human rights violations in the world. It knows no social, economic or national boundaries. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. However, Gender-based violence undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims, yet it remains shrouded in a culture of silence. Victims of violence can suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections including HIV and even death.

UNFPA is one of the UN's lead agencies working to further gender equality and women's empowerment, and to address the physical and emotional consequences of gender-based violence. UNFPA's programmes offer psychosocial assistance, medical treatment and rape kits to survivors, and promote the right of all women and girls to live free of violence and abuse.

Violence against women is a gender-based problem that is characteristic of every society and it takes different forms as well as occurs in varying dimensions. According to Carrillo (1992), violence against women takes such forms as battering, incest, assault, and rape, as found in every society; and also, female circumcision in Africa, dowry deaths in India and Akwa-Ibom State in Nigeria and militarization in Philippines. Carrillo stated further that violence against women also

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takes such stubble forms as limited employment opportunities for women, lack of access to education, women's social isolation, and sexual harassment that women face daily.

Bejing Declaration, the United Nations stated that violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following; physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, physical, sexual or psychological violence occurring within the community including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

However, in Nigeria, violence against women occurs mainly in form of rape, sexual harassment, wife abuse, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood practices, male-sex preference, as well as the existence of little or no opportunities from women to participate in most aspects of social life. According to Etuk (2003) also in Nigeria, beside children, most cases of ritual murder and trafficking involve women. There also exist other religious, cultural and legal barriers against women which could also be classified as violence against women. For example, they are restricted from bailing offenders in police custody. In the religious sphere, some religious bodies disallow women for being part of most aspects of religious activities while others simply have them covered with veils and long gowns, and then get them secluded. Also, in some rural areas in Nigeria, women are not allowed to go to certain places in the community or even take part in certain traditional festivals. All this constitutes violence against women because it threatens the well-being and meaningful existence of women, as it well defers them from participating effectively in and contributing meaningfully to social life.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN AND GIRLS
The impacts of the covid-19 on women and girls include rising rate of domestic or intimate partner violence, while lockdowns and social distancing may be particularly had on the survivors who may already be economically dependent on their abusers.

For instance, New York-Governments across the world must act urgently to prevent and tackle the rising rates of violence against women and girls during the covid-19 crisis by putting stronger measures in place such as designating shelters and hotline as emergency services and supporting police and the justice sector during lockdowns, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Guidance from UNDP, Gender-based violence and covid-19, also recommends developing new protocols to provide support via phone or online platforms rather than in person, expanding immediate response services in order to save lives and most ensuring that steps to prevent gender-based violence are in every covid-19 response plan and budget.

"Now more than ever there is a need to send a strong message that violence will not be tolerated, those who carry it out will be brought to justice and survivors will be heard and supported" said Raquel Lagunas, UNDP Gender Team Acting Director.

Together with other UN agencies, UNDP is working with more than 40 governments around the world to prevent and address gender-based violence during the general health crisis.

For instance, in Somalia UNDP is reporting communities to develop neighbourhood watch systems where men and women receive training to regularly patrol their neighbourhood to prevent or mitigate incidents of violence. Also in Botswana, community members, including school principals, tribal chiefs, farmers and nurses are raising awareness of the rise in violence and advising the government on village challenges and needs. In Mexico UNDP, in collaboration with UN women, is helping establish phone and online platforms to support vulnerable women via the LUNA centers, which are safe spaces for women and girls.

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In Nigeria the Presidential Task force on Covid-19 pandemic, Minister for Women Affairs in collaboration with the Federal Government and other NGO's agencies, STARR, NTA etc is helping women and girls who are survivors of violence to speak out as perpetrators will be duly punished.

Gender-based violence and covid-19 Gender-based violence (GBV) increases during every type of emergency whether economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks. Pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities, economic and social stress caused by the covid-19 pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV. Many women are in "lockdown" at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal support services. This briefing note provides concrete actions and strategies that UNDP, UN agencies and other development partners can take to prevent and address GBV in the context of covid-19. It includes recommendation for adapting dedicated GBV services and support to the crisis context and response in non-GBV specific interventions.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, A CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCES OF INEQUALITY

Gender-based violence is often reinforced by discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms that undermine opportunities for education, income and independence.

According to Selim Jahan (2018) Director of UNDP Human Development Report Office maintains that, the lack of women's empowerment is a critical form of inequality. While there are many barriers to empowerment, violence against women and girls (VAW) is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality.

Estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that about 1 in 3 (35 percent) of women and girls worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. However, these numbers shocking as they are only telling part of the story.

Thus, only 107 of 195 countries have data available on intimate partner violence for instance, a number that falls to just 56 countries when we seek to understand non-intimate partner violence. Even when data is available, it is likely that the figures are an underestimate as it is notoriously difficult to collect sensitive information on VAW as survivors may fear coming forward or feel ashamed.

VAW also has an impact on the lives of many women beyond the survivors. The fear of violence can prevent women from pursuing education, working or exercising their political rights and voice. A recent Gallup survey shows that in every region of the world, women consistently feel more insecure than men, although the levels of insecurity significantly vary across regions.

VAW is not only a cause of gender inequality; it is a consequence of it. In many places, gender-based violence is reinforced by discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms that undermine women and girls' opportunities for education, income and independence. Sometimes VAW accompanies shifting power relations within households and communities, especially when there is resentment against women who move away from conventional roles.

Today, 49 countries still do not have laws that protect women from domestic violence. In 32 countries the procedures that women face to obtain a passport differ from those of men. In 18 countries women need their husband's approval to take a job. Practices like early marriage are also widespread, particularly in low human development countries, where 39 percent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before their 18th Birthday.

Again, estimates from the 2015 Human Development Report show that even though women carry out the major share of global work (52 percent) they face disadvantages in both paid and unpaid work. They perform three times more unpaid work than men - 31 percent Vs 10 percent and, when their work is remunerated, they earn 24 percent less than their male counterparts. A professional "glass ceiling" means that women still hold only 22 percent of senior leadership job in business, and fewer than 25 percent of senior political and judicial positions.

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CLASSIFICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is a social ill that exists in numerous but diverse forms. Thus in all societies, most of the practices that constitute violence against women could be classified under any of these categories.

    i.   Cultural forms of violence against women
    ii.   Sexual forms of violence against women
    iii.   Physical forms of violence against women
    iv.   Religious forms of violence against women

However, note that there are other forms of violence against women that may not fall under the ones outlined in this study. Alternatively, the classification of form of violence against women is therefore not restricted to only the ones listed out here:

i) **Cultural forms of violence against women**: Cultural form of violence against women are those forms of violence against women that have their roots in the culture or traditional practices of different societies. Culture is the way of life of people. It defines what is accepted as right or wrong in a particular society. It also determines the values, ideas, and beliefs of people in a particular society as well as what they practice as tradition or as custom.

Okolo (2003) observed that, it is culture that determines how people live in a particular society, it is not surprising therefore to find that a good number of the violence women face in different societies have their roots in the culture of the people in these societies. For instance; some of these cultural practices which constitute violence against women, and which are classified here as culturally based are; Female Genital Mutilation, commonly described as FGM, widowhood practice, early marriage, male sex preferences etc.

In the societies where they are practiced, these forms of violence against women are simply practiced as culture or tradition, that is, what has been the practice from the time of their ancestors. As such, people in societies where these practices exist, including the women themselves, hardly see these practices as harmful or as constituting violence to the women folk. Instead, they are simply accepted as tradition, so much that the people who practice them, including women, do everything within their capability to preserve the practices for future generation. This to an extent explains why efforts at eradicating these practices have not yielded, results over the years.

ii) **Sexual forms of violence against women:** The form of violence against women that falls under here include rape, sexual harassment appear to be very common, although women trafficking and forced prostitution have since the dawn of the twenty-first century been on the increase. Thus, sexual forms of violence against women are usually aimed at exploiting women sexually, and they constitute about the most damaging forms of violence women face. Apart from the effect they leave on the health and general well-being of women, sexual forms of violence against women are more damaging because their victims feel ashamed and devalued, and as such they hardly discuss their experiences, thereby making it difficult for the problem to be addressed or eradicated.

iii) **Physical forms of violence against women:** Physical forms of violence against women consist of the direct and open forms of confrontation and attacks women receive, usually from the men, and specifically from their husbands and lovers. Domestic violence which usually has women as its victims fall under this category of violence against women. Etuk (2003) opined that, in many homes, women face continuous battery and abuse from their husbands. Thus, our discussion of domestic violence as a physical form of violence against women would be centered around wife abuse/battery, because women are the disadvantaged parties in most, if not all cases of domestic violence. However, domestic violence or wife abuse/battery specifically constitutes a physical form of violence against women because it involves the use of force or the threat of it on women by men, especially their husbands/lovers. It also involves

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the direct infliction of injury on women by their husbands/lovers who see it as a means of safeguarding their "ego" or still, their authority as heads in the home. Unlike the sexual forms, physical form of violence against women are easier to identify. Yet only little could be done, and has been done over the years to curb the ill.

iv) **Religious forms of violence against women:** Religion is another sphere of social life from where practices that constitute violence against women emanate. Of all the religions found around the world, none really has a place for women. In Nigeria for instance, there are three major religions, namely Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. A close look at these religions shows that not only do they have little or no place for women, also certain practices within these religions constitute violence against women. Some Christian groups for example, believe that when it comes to certain religious activities, women should be "silent". Silent here means much more than not speaking. It means restriction from holding relevant religious positions and also from full participation in a number of religious activities. This perhaps explains why among the Christian groups that are of this school of thought, women are not allowed to be Pastors, Reverends, Bishops, Elders and so on. The highest position some them are permitted to hold is the position of women's leader.

Consequently, among Muslim groups, the case is even worse. Not only are Muslim women meant to be silent, also their mode of dressing is restricted to flowing gowns or wrappers and veils to cover their faces and bodies. Worst still is the issue of the seclusion of Muslim women in Purdah. Even when they are not in Purdah, they are confined to the walls of their homes, especially if they are married, and they are restricted from moving freely especially during the day.

Similarly, under the African traditional religion, women suffer different degrees of violence. Their participation in a number of traditional religious activities is usually disallowed from stepping into certain shrines. Worst still, if they are in their "period"/ "menses" they are simply terms and treated as unclean, yet when human sacrifices are required, female virgins become the best options.

Alternatively, from the foregoing, it is evident that even in the sphere of religion, which deals with man's relationship with supernatural, women have little or no place. Instead, they face practices which in one way or the other constitute violence against them.

DANGERS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Bejing Declaration observed that violence instills fear and insecurity into women. These in-turn constrain their mobility and limit their access to resources and basic activities, thereby forcing them into subordinate position compared with men. This in the long run becomes an obstacle to development and the achievement of equality.

Still on the danger of violence against women, Carrillo (1992) stated that it both maims and debilitates women, as well as serves as a form of control that limits their ability to options in homes, schools, workshops, etc. This contradicts the major goal of development for women which is that of increasing their self-confidence and their ability to participate in all aspects of social life. Carrillo stated further that violence against women disrupts lives, denies them options, undermines their confidence, and physical and psychological sense of esteem, destroys their health, denies their human right as well as undermines their full participation in social life. Again, as Bart and Moran (1993) put it, violence against women are interrelated, coalescing like a girdle to keep women in their place, which is subordination to men. In the case of Nigeria, the effects of violence against women are numerous. Unfortunately, only very limited literatures exist on the issue, the effect of this being widespread ignorance on both the issue and ways of handling its occurrence.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design to examine the danger of gender-based violence and women emancipation among women and girls from Cross River State using non-probabilistic sampling techniques comprising of purposeful and convenience techniques. The research instrument used for the study was the structural questionnaire. This was a modified form of the research instrument used by Sternberg (1986), Pivot and Diener (1993) Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1986) and Hatfield and Rapson (1993). This was necessary to better address the new respondents in a different environment. Participants were given up to two weeks to complete and return the questionnaires. In addition, participants were guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point. Out of the 357 copies questionnaire administered, 343 were retrieved and analyzed giving us a response rate of 96.1% out of the 343 respondents, 105 were female students and 238 were general public opinions of Cross Riverians. Data collected were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis and t-test with the aid of statistical package or social science (SPSS) version 21. A pilot study to determine the level of reliability was carried out on 78 married couples who part of the study within a time interval of two weeks. Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instruments as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Reliability statistic of variables

Scale	No. of Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Gender-based violence	8	.88
Women emancipation	3	.76
High level of vulnerability	7	.81
Low level of vulnerable group	7	.79

Source: From questionnaire administered, 2020.

The results yield a coefficient of 0.88, 0.76, 0.81 and 0.79, which satisfied the general recommended level of 0.70 for the research indicators (Cronbach, 1957). Also, the questionnaire was validated by experts in social sciences. Hence, researchers satisfied both reliability and validity of the scale.

Results

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Gender-base violence	Co-efficient
Violence against women	• Women emancipation • High level of effects of violence against women • Low level of impact on women vulnerability/emancipation	.913** *857** .794**

**Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels
Source: SPSS output, 2020.

Table 2 shows the correlation between gender-based violence and women emancipation, high level of violence against women and low levels of women emancipation among women and girls in Nigeria. There exists a significant positive high correlation between the predictor (violence) and the response variables (women emancipation, high level of effect of violence against women and low level of impact of women emancipation on the society). (r=.913,857 and .794, n=143, p<0.05). This implies that gender-based violence has a strong and positive relationship with low level of women emancipation. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

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Table 3: Multiple regression analysis showing the impact of independent variable on the dependent variables

Dependent variable	Independent variable	R	R^2	Adj-R^2	F	Beta	T-value
Gender-based violence	Women emancipation	.815	*641	*460	34.273	*379	7.461
High level of effect of violence against women	Women emancipation	*748	*539	*317	21.409	*619	9.536
Low level of impact of women emancipation	Women emancipation	*793	*602	*332	23.386	*619	12.832

Source: SPSS output, 2020.

Table 3 shows that the R^2 squared statistic as explained by the fitted model implies that about 64.1%, 53.9% and 60.2% of the total variation in Gender-based violence, high level of effect of violence against women and low level of impact of women emancipation are statistically significant with F.value of 34.273, 21.409, 23.386 and P-value of 0.000. The regression coefficients, t-statistic and p-values for the model implies that women vulnerability exerts a positive and statistically significant impact of Gender-based violence, high level of impact of violence against women and low level of impact of women emancipation among women and girls in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4: T-test results

Category of Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	P	T-crit.	T.Cal	Decision
Male	38	4.26	*52	96	0.05	1.99	1.53	Accept
Female	105	4.94	*88					

Source: SPSS Output, 2020

According to the results presented in table 4 above, the calculated "t" (1.53) is less than the critical "t" (1.99) at 0.05 alpha level and 96 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on the impact of Gender-based violence and women emancipation. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results amongst others revealed that there is a significant positive and strong relationship between Gender-based violence and women emancipation. However, Gender-based violence is more strongly associated with low level of women economic empowerment/emancipation. The finding is in agreement with Etuk (2003), Etuk and Bassey 2019 and Boye-Akelemor (2019) studies that revealed the relationship between violence against women and women empowerment. As predicted, the study also revealed that Gender-based violence exerts a positive and statistically significant impact on the level of women emancipation.

The finding is in agreement with Selim Juhan (2018) study which revealed that the lack of women empowerment is a critical form of inequality. While there are many barriers to empowerment, violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. Thus, Gender-based violence is often reinforced by discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms that undermine opportunities for education, income and independence. Finally, the study revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean opinion of male and female students on the impact of Gender-based violence and women emancipation on our society specially in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

LIMITATION

Due to the fact the scope of the study was restricted to only University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH) Calabar, Cross River State where it seeks to

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make generalization to all the tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria and the society as a whole; the major limitation there arises because it was not representative enough, other limitations include the smallness of the sample size, the inability to obtain a completely random sample and the restriction of the study to only two tertiary educational institution in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The monster Gender-based violence can be tamed in our society, especially in the nation tertiary institution. The article centered around likely causes of Gender-based violence in Nigeria, legislation and policies of Gender-based violence, the need for women empowerment/emancipation, problems associated with violence against women regarding the classification of violence against women: cultural forms, sexual forms, religious forms and physical forms violence. Dangers/consequences of gender-based violence on academic works standards and socio-psychological state of victims, strategies for effective control of violence against women, the roles of government, civic society, female lecturers in higher institutions, and the general public in combating the menace of Gender-based violence and the need for women emancipation. It is hope that the society especially our tertiary institutions will help uphold the pride of women in our society so that the monster eating deep into fabric of our society and the educational sector can be eradicated or minimized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study; the following recommendations are put forward so that the ugly monster called Gender-based violence is tamed.

- It is clearly vital to support women and girls who encounter violence, for example by ensuring they have access to justice, shelter and protection, whether violence is domestic or in the work place.
- But to break the VAW circle, policy interventions should focus on the longer-term by changing discriminatory social norms; closing gender gaps whether they are educational, economic or social level; or building awareness about VAW.
- Innovative and aggressive policy that aims to change outcomes (such as increasing women's voice in the community) may change norms. Although norms should guide the design of culturally sensitive policies and programs, they should not constrain or undermine initiatives.
- Progress has been made on many important fronts, such as closing gaps between men and women in primary education and political participation; but there has been inertia and stagnation in others, as employment. A much greater effort is needed to tackle the patterns of violence that cut deep into societies so that they are not perpetuated across generations Selim Jahan (2018).
- If women empowerment must be realistic at all levels, women must be given equal opportunities as men to both express themselves as well as participate in all spheres of social life.
- Government should ensure strict enforcement of laws that would protect women's rights, as well as deter men from abusing their wives, also the enforcement agents should make sure that reported cases of Gender-based violence are thoroughly investigated.
- Women organizational groups should carry out advocacy campaigns on the need for women to be educationally and economically empowered.
- A religious value that makes for the restriction of women's freedom should be dropped while those that make for their complete integration in all spheres of social life should be adopted.
- Innovative and well-designed policies that are targeted at women emancipation should be encountered.

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- Government should support women and girls who encounter violence, for instance, by ensuring they have access to justice, shelter and protection, even if violence is domestic or in workplace.
- Institutions of higher learning must not be male dominated but gender balanced. However, anti-harassment and awareness programs should be put in place to disseminate sexual harassment condemnation messages both within and outside the university communities.
- Government, NGO's, civil society group and the general public should enact and implement laws that will deter and minimized Gender-based violence in our society.
- Tertiary institutions sexual harassment policy should be formulated and implemented at the institute in order to deter there would be harassers and protect the potential victims.
- Proper and functional guidance and counseling units should be established in all departments of our tertiary institutions.

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