

DETERMINING FACTORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Sexual violence includes some form of sexual abuse such as unwanted sexual comments and unwanted sexual touching. Domestic sexual violence is that perpetrated by intimate partners and by other family members. Violence against women takes various forms. The incidences of violence against women in Africa include domestic violence, rape, forced and early marriages, human trafficking, prostitution and female genital mutilation. According to Ganny (1996), violence against women is a violation of women's basic human rights and serves as a barrier to achieving gender equality, development and peace. Okereke (2006:6), argues that many countries in Africa have set the age at which young girls can be married at 15 and 21 years of age under both Islamic and customary laws. The objectives of the study are to identify the factors influencing sexual violence in Africa and also to understand the consequences of sexual violence.

Key words: sexual abuse, sexual violence, patriarchy, prostitution, poverty.

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Introduction

Sexual violence is not geographically or demographically discrete; it is a global issue that affects all ages and genders. Children are a key target group due to their societal status and multiple vulnerabilities in areas affected by conflict. Sexual violence is pervasive in all settings (public and private) and is more likely to be opportunistic than a tactic of war. The perpetrators of sexual violence are more often civilian than they are combatants.

The term sexual violence includes, but is not limited to, rape. As **Anne Marie Goetz**, Chief Advisor for Governance, Peace and Security for the UN's Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), points out, international law further includes in its definition of sexual violence: forced prostitution; sexual slavery; forced impregnation; forced maternity; forced termination of pregnancy; enforced sterilization; indecent assault; trafficking; inappropriate medical examinations and strip searches. It also includes some forms of sexual abuse such as unwanted sexual comments and unwanted sexual touching. The most commonly studied form of sexual violence is rape.

In the literature on sexual violence in war-affected countries two broad categories of sexual violence can be distinguished: *Conflict-related sexual violence* is that perpetrated by combatants rebels, militias, and government forces. This is the sexual violence that most studies and reports focus on. *Domestic sexual violence* is that perpetrated by intimate partners and by other family/household members. It also includes sexual assaults by noncombatant acquaintances, although these usually only constitute a very small minority of assaults. Available statistics show that women and girls are most likely to experience sexual violence in conflict and should be at the centre of any initiative to combat it. Nonetheless, in the past decade incidents of sexual violence against men and boys, including sexual enslavement and forced rape, have been reported in over 25 conflicts worldwide (or almost all 59 armed conflicts identified by the Human Security Report if conflict-displacement of men and boys is included). Sectoral experts are increasingly acknowledging the seriousness of the issue, but this has not yet translated into or been adequately addressed within the common discourse or policymaking.

Violence against women takes various forms. The incidences of violence against women in Africa include domestic violence, rape, forced and early marriages, human trafficking,

prostitution and female genital mutilation. According to **Ganny**, (1996.), violence against women is a violation of women's basic human rights and serves as a barrier to achieving gender equality, development and peace. **Okereke** (2006:6) argues that many countries in Africa have set the age at which young girls can be married at 15 and 21 years of age under both Islamic and customary laws. However, girls are married as early as 12 years of age and sometimes these young girls are forcefully married (**Human Rights Watch**,2003b).

Other forms of violence against women in Africa include widow inheritance, wife battering, denial of reproductive health rights and right to education. Some countries in Africa have discriminatory laws against women. For instance, men have the right to divorce their wives whilst women cannot (**Amnesty International**, 2005a).Sexual violence has no political or cultural boundaries. It takes place in all societies and in every culture. Less visible, however, is the prevalence of IPSV, which our analysis shows to be extraordinarily high. Specifically, we found that the number of women reporting IPSV was roughly 1.8 times the number of women reporting rape (221 and 121 per 1000 women of reproductive age, respectively). This result is in line with international research indicating that intimate partner sexual violence is the most pervasive form of violence against women (**Heise et al**, 2002).

Many factors account for the increase of likelihood of abuse by a man against his wife or partner. Many of those who violently abuse their partner were witnesses to marital violence at home, having an absentee father and control of wealth within the family. These acts of violence against women is due to the patriarchal system of control of women and their bodies by men. A wide range of sexually violent acts can take place in different circumstances and settings as part of the patriarchal order. Intimate partner violence against women is a form of patriarchal social expression and control of women. Intimate partner violence in a relationship includes physical violence, forced sexual intercourse, psychological harm, aggression and controlling of women's behaviour. (**Krug et al**, 2002: 1084).

Patriarchy is also reflected in other economic and social institutions and organizations. **Walby** (1996:24) suggests that patriarchy is composed of structures namely: patriarchal relations

in household, patriarchal relations in paid work (employment), patriarchal relations in politics (power), male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in culture. Patriarchy according to Juliet Mitchell as cited in **Bhasin** (1993:5) is “ a kinship system in which men exchange women, and to the symbolic power that fathers exercise within these systems which is responsible for the ‘inferiorised psychology of women’”. A system of socially constructed structures and practices in men dominate women in almost all spheres of life.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the factors influencing sexual violence in Africa
2. To understand the consequences of sexual violence.

Determining factors of sexual violence

- **Socio-Economic and Cultural Situations of Women:** Women are facing many challenges including illiteracy, poverty, economic dependence, outmoded culture and traditional beliefs systems and lack of power in decision making. One of the serious violations of the rights of women is dowry payment for a prospective bride. The payment of dowry has resulted in disputes between the families of the bride and the groom.
- **Perceptions of Sexual Violence :** A few years ago, the people had little or no knowledge about the acts of violence meted out to women and children was a crime. However, the activities of government and non-governmental organizations have contributed immensely to change the perceptions of the people towards violence against women, children and girls.
- **Culture and Tradition:** In a community where the people cherish their culture and tradition, a lot of the people find it difficult to do away with it. The male hegemony which is characterized by the low recognition given to women because of their gender has put them in a subordinated role and made the woman subservient in the society. Women are taught right from childhood to be submissive to men through the socializing process and to be obedient and respect for authority (**Kambarami**,2006).

- **Lack of resources:** The availability of resources in the society determines the power relations in a society. Lack of resources available to women has indeed made women prone to sexual violence and the violation of their human rights. The other causes of sexual violence in the community is the use of hard drugs and alcoholism by the young men.
- **Poverty:** One of the major problems facing women globally is the effects of poverty. Poverty makes it difficult for people to leave descent lives and this exposes them to all sorts of violence and abuse and the lack of political voice to contribute to policies and programs that will improve their lives. The majority of women are poor especially in the rural areas where there are no economic opportunities for them.

Consequences of sexual violence

Sexual violence against women in war and its aftermath can have almost inestimable short and long-term negative health consequences. Evidence suggests that male and female survivors of sexual violence may experience similar mental health, behavioural and social consequences (Andrew G. et al, 2004, Dube SR et al, 2005, Patel V et al,2001). However, girls and women bear the overwhelming burden of injury and disease from sexual violence and coercion, not only because they comprise the vast majority of victims but also because they are vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health consequences such as unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and a higher risk of sexually transmitted infections, including from HIV, during vaginal intercourse.

a) It leads to unwanted pregnancies, b)It also resulted in physically transmitted sexual diseases such as STD,HIV and fistula, c) It leads to depression, drug and alcohol abuse. d)It resulted in early forced marriage, disrupted education and reduced livelihood options (e.g. sex work), e)At familial level it leads to breakdown in social/ familial structures, fear, lack of trust and confidence, loss of cohesion. f)It leads to possibility of victims becoming perpetrators

Conclusion

It has been concluded that majority of the females in developing countries are facing the problem of sexual violence. Those women with low level of education and low economic status are experiencing more violence through their husband or relatives than those with high socio-economic status. It becomes necessary to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural women to certain extent to prevent such violence.

Suggestions

It becomes necessary to implement the following suggestions:

- Local customs, laws and practices must be taken into account and fully considered when addressing sexual violence as an international issue.
- International interventions on sexual violence should prioritise working with local communities and funding community-based approaches to prevention and aftercare, as well as creating platforms and dialogues that address the challenges of perpetrators themselves.
- Interventions must address all aspects of the impacts and consequences of sexual violence: physical, psychological and life-limiting.
- Implementing effective legislation, policies and programs to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, with a focus on girls.
- Empowering civil society, communities and families to be accountable and take action to address the social tolerance of violence against children, especially sexual violence against girls, and promote a climate of social change against harmful norms, attitudes, behaviors and practices.
- Providing comprehensive health care and medico-legal services for rape survivors is paramount.

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