

Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Exploring the Causes and Prevention in Bayelsa State

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doi : <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjpsa.2013/vol12n3112>

Published: September 16, 2024

Citation: Fiemotongha C. and Seaman O.L. (2024) Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Exploring the Causes and Prevention in Bayelsa State, *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, Vol.12, No.3, pp.1-12

Abstract: *Gender based violence; especially violence against the female gender has continued to pose a problem not only to local communities but to national governments and the international community. This study, Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Exploring the Causes and Prevention in Bayelsa State, examines the causes of gender based violence and the measures put in place by the government to prevent it. What are the causes of gender based violence in Bayelsa State? The government of Bayelsa state have put in place several measures to combat and prevent gender based violence, including the domestication of the Child Rights Act and Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP). However, despite the domestication of these legislations the phenomenon persists. The remoteness of communities and the difficulty in accessing them makes response to cases of gender based violence difficult in the State. The level of awareness is another challenge to the prevention of violence against women and girls in the state. If Bayelsa state must get it right strategic response centers must be established not only in the state capital but in the rural areas where most cases of gender based violence are not reported. The study employed Quantitative and qualitative methods, and the theoretical framework for the study is the radical feminist theory.*

Keywords: gender based violence, Bayelsa, Nigeria, women

INTRODUCTION

There are international, national and local collaborations against the phenomenon of gender based violence but these are yet to yield the expected results. There are legislations by global bodies and national governments which have also been domesticated at the local levels. The united Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Declaration in the Elimination of violence Against Women (DEVAW), Calling on states to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish perpetrators of violence against women whether the acts are committed by states or individuals (Abena, 2023).

Bayelsa state has since domesticated the violence Against person's prohibition Act (VAPP), and the Child Rights Act, but the state is still confronted with peculiar challenges relating to violence against the female gender. The state has also put in place other legal instruments. The Bayelsa state government in her concerted efforts to address the problem of gender based

violence has put in place measures to prevent or mitigate further occurrence of gender related violence against women, Such as the Bayelsa state Action Plan (BSAP) for the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 13 25, on Women, Peace and Security, the Female Genital Prohibition Law, Administration of Criminal Justice Law of Bayelsa state, Widows and Widowers Protection Law etc, to ensures and gender equality and put a stop to violence against women. Efforts to domicile the violence Against persons prohibition Acts (VAPP) in Bayelsa state received a boost as it was passed into law by the legislature (Ese, 2021).

However, some inherent factors that have not been amenable and have defied these legislations and measures put in place, are traditional norms and cultural practices, difficulty in accessing the rural communities and poverty of women. The then Women Affairs Minister, Tallen(2021), maintains that poverty is a principal cause of gender based violence, according to her not economically empowering woman to be able to cater for themselves makes them vulnerable to abuse. There is need to establish strategic. Response centers in the rural communities to deter potential offenders and ensure that the purpose for which legislations and measures put in place to prevent violence against women and girls are achieved.

The State

The state is the largest political entity with distinct characteristics that distinguishes it from all other political establishments. The state is a special form of human organization which exists within a defined territory with a government, subjects, and claims supremacy over all other institutions within it (Ezeani, 2010). States territorially define political units that exercise internal authority and recognize no legitimate external authority over them(Rourke and Boyer 2000). A state is the institution that exercise a monopoly of coercive authority and tho dominant actors in international politics. State have basic characteristics , and they include ,sovereignty, a government, population territory and diplomatic immunity.

Gender Based Violence

According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), violence is an act of coercion involving physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill someone or something, resulting to harm/damage. This damage may be physical or both. Section 18(g) of the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State,2007 defines domestic violence to mean physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation including but not limited to rape, incest, and sexual assault, starvation, emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, economic abuse, exploitation, denial of basic education, intimidation, harassment, stalking, hazardous attack including acid, both with offensive and poisonous substance, damage to property among others.

Theoretical framework

This study employed the Radical Ferminist theory, to explain the prevalence of patriarchy in Bayelsa State and the distribution of roles between men and women. The them which was developed in the 1960s had katerine Millet (1934-2017) an American feminist, writer and the mother of Radical feminism. However, there are other famous radical feminist that includes Andrea Dworken, Catherine mackinmon, Valerie solanas and Alice walker.

Radical feminists believe that the root cause of gender inequality in society is patriarchy, therefore they seek to terminate it by restructuring society. The aim of radical feminism is to eliminate patriarchal systems that perpetuate male dominance and bring about gender equality, reform traditional structures that reinforce patriarchal values and ensure the rights of women, including bodily autonomy (Olivia 2024). Radical feminists argue that women are violently oppressed by men as a result of economic power they possess in society, because of the patriarchal roles assigned them.

The theory stands in opposition to the liberal and Marxist feminist theories which see violence and oppression of women by men from an economic perspective, while radical feminism sees the dominance of men as a systemic problem that has to do with societal norms and cultural beliefs. The cause of gender inequality is neither a lack of civil and political rights, as liberal feminist thought, nor the capitalist economic system, as Marxist feminists conceptualized but patriarchal appropriation of roles, therefore radical feminists insist that women's oppression is of a systemic nature (Camille 2021).

The theory is employed in this study to explain societal norms and cultural beliefs in Bayelsa state, which still assigns certain roles to men and women and girls, and poses a barrier to preventive mechanisms put in place by the government. Some of these customary practices and beliefs are widely accepted and therefore difficult even for the government to alter.

An Overview of Gender Based Violence

Gender-based violence against women and the girl child, may not be interpreted to mean the same thing in different political systems or societies, which may be due to environmental factors/norms or laws, and this is why even the definition of GBV is characterized by these factors in some societies. Alapiki, (2004) defines violence as a destructive behavior in an intimate relationship where one person attempts to dominate and control the other in a dating, married, or cohabiting relationship, resulting in physical, psychological, or sexual harm. This definition is restricted to partners in an intimate relationship, and not encompassing, as it does not include rape victims, the unmarried, and the girl child. The definition by the United Nations (UN) could be applied to describe gender-based violence in any environment. Violence against any woman is any act of violence that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (WHO, 2019). Several factors determine the prevalence of gender-based violence in any environment. There are similarities and dissimilarities because of differences in environmental factors. However, there is an implied consensus amongst scholars that, gender-based violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women.

Lack of economic empowerment for women, belief in the superiority of men over women, cultural norms, drug addiction, lack of strong legal framework, illiteracy, conflicts and periods of natural disasters, failure of the state, remoteness of communities, etc, are known factors that determine the prevalence of gender-based violence in any society or environment. These factors also manifest in different forms, though mostly in the form of physical violence, other forms include; confinement, female genital mutilation, exploitation, psychological abuse, denial of resources, and other coercive behaviors of men over the female gender. Now, one

major factor that could have addressed the problem of gender-based violence and drastically curtail it is a strong legal framework. The failure of the state to put in place a strong legal framework that is capable of deterring potential perpetrators has contributed to the persistence of gender-based violence. Thus, building a strong legal framework against all forms of domestic violence/gender-based violence DV/GBV, as well as empowering women economically has the potential to drastically reduce the cases of gender-based violence

Gender Based Violence in Bayelsa State

The phenomenon of gender-based violence in Bayelsa State is directed more at women, though it could have both men and women as victims, the majority of victims have been women and girls. From the creation of the State in 1996 to date, there has been a plethora of recorded violent cases by men against women, who are disproportionately weaker in comparison with the male gender. The ubiquity of gender-based violence in the State is becoming a menace, as the phenomenon persists despite the measures and legislations put in place to address it. There are both international and national legislations on violence against women and the girl child, but these legislations are yet to nip it in the bud. The Bayelsa State government in its concerted efforts to address the menace of gender-based violence has, through the legislature enacted laws to deter potential perpetrators, and rural communities have been sensitized on gender-based violence through non-governmental organizations. Efforts to domicile the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law in Bayelsa State received a boost as it was passed into law by the State House of Assembly (Ese, 2021).

Scores of gender-advocacy groups in the state, including the Collins Cocodia Foundation, Do Foundation International, End Violence Against Women (EVAW), Starrz Safety Initiatives, Fida, World Health Organization, MWAN, Association Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, CCCRN, the Bayelsa State Gender Response Initiative Team (GRIT) and the Nigeria Bar Association, (NBA, Women Forum), have all lent their voice to the need for speedy prosecution of culprits and the quick treatment of victims of gender-based violence (Okem, 2023). Though there are concerted efforts to reduce violent cases against women and the girl child in the State, especially as there is a synergy and advocacy by the groups, the phenomenon is yet to be fully addressed.

Despite legislations by the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, the Federal Government, and International Organizations on violence against women and the girl child, the State in order to tackle the menace of gender-related violence, especially against women also initiated other measures.

Gender Inequality

Globally, woman face discrimination in several other spheres of life and this has negatively affected not just the victims but the general wellbeing of the larger society. Women face not just economics and political discrimination \ by men but other known and unknown forms of discrimination in different political environments. Gender bias is a worldwide phenomenon, but it is especially pernicious in the third world, where most activities of woman take place in the non-wage economy mainly for the purpose of the household (Kaarbo and Ray 2011). This discrimination against women by men who dominate especially the economics and political

spere is compounded for women and society in general in some political environments, like Nigeria where a violent content is added. This is so because gender bias or discrimination against women, and violence can cause poverty, as it can prevent thousands of women and girls in a political environment from obtaining the right education, training, child care, as well as the social status required to meaningfully contribute to the development of society. Though women are not the only victims of gender inequality men also suffer discrimination but this cannot be compared to the rate at which women suffer abuse and violence from men. According to the world health organization, women between the ages of 15 and 44 are more likely to die or suffer incapacitation as a result of violence than from cancer malaria or traffic accidents.

As already mentioned, there are various forms gender inequality suffered by women in different parts of the globe, but violence against women has become a global menace. Studies have revealed that there is female deficit in some countries. Some of these countries identify millions of unborn girls and abort them before they were born. It is estimated that china identified and aborts about 1.7 million unborn girls before they were born each year.

In Africa, and Nigeria in particular one commonest form of gender inequality is violence against women. Violence against women take various forms, including female genital mutilations which leaves an indelible mark on the victims. Female genital mutilation and other forms of physical violence like rape and domestic violence are commonest in this part of Nigeria. One contributing factor is the belief system, values and customs Despite universal legislations such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by 185 countries and local enactments, the problem of gender inequality and violence continue to persist and Bayelsa State is not an exception. Women in Bayelsa State have at different times called on the federal and state governments to put in place measures that will ensure gender equality and social inclusion in society (wiliie 2023).

Causes of Gender Based Violence

The prevalence of gender base violence in any environment can be attributed to several factors, however these factors are not stereo-typed in all political environment or societies. There are common causes of violence against women which could be found in almost every society and there are also causes of violence that are peculiar to some environments. Causes of violence in Nigeria are deeply rooted in multiple factors, including harmful cultural practices, poverty, lack of education, the belief system etc. These factors contribute significantly to the perpetration of violence against the women and the girl child (Efefairoro,2023)

The major prevailing circumstances that expose women to domestic violence in Bayelsa state are the belief system or customs, norms and prevailing value system, which have to do with the distribution of roles between men and women. This existing cultural belief makes the male gender overbearing and aggressive towards the female gender. These roles are further influenced by perception and expectations arising from cultural, political, environmental, socio- economic and religious factors as well as ethnicity class and individual or institutional bias (Alapiki, 2004)

Though international and national legislations have been made to combat the scourge of violence on women and the girl child, effective mechanism for the implementation of these legislations must be put in place to achieve the purpose for which these laws were made. Education and awareness campaign should also be embarked upon by government and civil society organization (CSO) to enlighten especially rural people on the evil of violence against the female gender. Collaboration between the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community groups or leadership to create a network that can address the problem of gender based violence even in the rural communities. Religious and traditional leaders are held in high esteem in some societies, the fore it is important to engage them in the fight for gender equality, as these leaders exert significant influence and authority. Legal support services are also important here because victims and survivors of violence face barriers in seeking justice, and some of these barriers can be avoided if there is effective collaboration. Lack of economic empowerment for women and complete dependence on the male gender is another contributing factor to violence against women. When the earnings of the man as the bread winner of the family cannot meet the demands of the home, it leads to frustration and consequently leads to aggression.

Response of the State

In response to gender-based violence, the Bayelsa State Governor, Sen. Douye Diri, inaugurated an 18-member State's Gender Response Initiative Team (GRIT) headed by a gender advocate and legal practitioner, Dise Ogbise, to curb cases of domestic violence against persons in the State (Osahon, 2021). The committee was advised to work in synergy with other relevant authorities to achieve the objectives for which it was established. In the words of the Governor, "Domestic violence is rising regardless of tribe, gender, religion, and social status. We expect the committee to work with MDAs, especially the ministry of women affairs and justice to ensure that the law is implemented to the latter". Members of the committee are professionals drawn from different works of life and part of their terms of reference was to take the campaign of violence against women and the girl child to all parts of the State. In other to deter potential offenders and see that the law swings into action immediately in Bayelsa State, the wife of the Governor Dr. Gloria Diri, leading other gender advocates also visited the State Police Command to seek the cooperation of the Police in the area of investigation and prosecution of offenders.

Several factors contribute to gender-based violence in Bayelsa State, however, it is important to note that some of these factors are peculiar to the Bayelsa environment, while others are common factors that could be found anywhere.

The major propelling force that endangers gender-based violence in the State is the belief system and norms which has to do with the distribution of roles against men and women. These cultural norms and beliefs makes the male gender controlling and aggressive. These roles are influenced by perceptions and expectations arising from cultural, political, environmental, Socio-Economic, and religious factors, as well as custom, ethnicity, law, class, and individual or institutional bias (Alapiki, 2004, p.178).

Governor Diri (in Briseimo 2021), addressing the persistence of gender-based violence, was categorical. According to him, "There is a cultural belief in Nigeria that is socially acceptable

to hit a woman and discipline a spouse, cases of domestic violence are on the rise and shows no sign of abating in Nigeria, and even in our dear State Bayelsa”.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was collected from respondents through the administration of questionnaire which was subjected to statistical analysis. Simple percentage was used in the analysis of data collected from the field.

Table 1: Questionnaires Distributed and Returned

S/N	Communities/LGAs	Distributed	Returned	Percentage
1	Yenagoa	60	55	91.67
2	Sagbama	60	50	83.33
3	Southern ijaw	65	45	69.23
4	Ekeremor	55	43	66.15
5	Ogbia	50	42	84
6	Nembe	40	30	75
7	Brass	50	40	80
8	Kolokuma	40	35	87.5
	Total	420	340	80.95

Field work

Table 2: Data Distribution and Frequency Table

Sex	Number of respondents	%
Male	190	55.88
Female	150	44.12
Total	340	100

Table 3: RQ 1
Causes of Violence Against Women and Girls

S/N	ITEMS	Frequency and Percentage					
		A	SA	U	D	SD	REMARK
1.	Cultural norms and beliefs are mayor causes of gender based violence.	215	60	2	40	23	agree
		63.24%	17.65%	0.06%	11.76%	6.76%	
2.	Absence of a mechanism for women empowerment contributes to violence against women.	264	40	Nil	28	10	agree
		77.65%	11.76%		8.24%	2.94%	
3.	Remoteness and difficulty id not a cause a contributing factor to violence against women.	215	65	5	35	20	agree
		63.24%	19.12%	1.47%	10.29%	5.88%	
4.	Poverty is not necessarily a gender based violence.	22	13	2	225	78	disagree
		6.47%	3.82%	0.06%	66.18%	22.94%	
5.	Bad governance is not a cause of gender based violence.	52	28	Nil	165	95	disagreed
		15.29%	8.24%		48.53%	27.94%	

Field work

The table above shows the response of respondents to questions on the questionnaire provided in frequency and percentage.

As shown on the table above, in response to item 1 under RQ1, 215 respondent which is 63.24% of the total number of respondents agreed that cultural norms and beliefs are major causes of gender-based violence in Bayelsa state while 60 respondents strongly agreed amounting to 17.65% of the total respondents. Even though 2 respondents were undecided and 40 respondents disagreed and 23 respondents strongly disagreed, majority of respondents (275) out of the sample population agreed that cultural norms and beliefs are major causes of gender based violence in Bayelsa State.

In response to whether absence of a mechanism for women empowerment contributes to violence against women, 264 respondents which s about 77.65% of the sample population agreed absence of women empowerment contributes to violence against women when 40

respondents, which is 11.76%, strongly agreed. On the other hand 28 respondents disagreed while 10 respondents (2.94%) strongly disagreed, therefore there is absence of a mechanism for women empowerment and this contributes to violence against women.

As demonstrated on the table, 22 respondents, which is 6.47% of the sample were of the opinion that poverty is not necessarily a cause of gender based violence 13 respondents (3.82%) strongly agreed, 2 respondents (0.06%) undecided while 225 and 78 respondents amounting to 66.18% and 22.94% disagreed and strongly disagreed that poverty is not necessarily a cause of gender based violence. Therefore, in summation it was agreed that poverty is a cause of gender based violence.

Respondents also disagreed that bad governance is not a cause of gender based violence in Bayelsa state. 48.53% which is about 165 respondents and 27.94% 95 respondents disagreed while 52 and 28, about 15.29% and 8.24% agreed bad governance is not a cause of gender based violence. It is therefore discernible from the responses of respondents on the table that bad governance is a cause of gender based violence in Bayelsa state.

**Table 4: RQ 2
Government Response to Violence Against Women.**

S/N	Items	Frequency and Percentage					Remark
		A	SA	U	D	SD	
1.	There is government response to violence against women.	62	28	90	110	50	agreed
	Government have responded to violence against women.	18.24 %	8.24%	26.47%	32.35%	14.71%	
2.	Prevention measures have curtailed violence against women	100	70	20	120	30	agreed
		29.41 %	20.59 %	5.88%	35.29%	8.82%	
3.	Domesticated laws and other measures to prevent violence against women are not effective.	190	100	10	30	10	agreed
		55.88 %	29.41 %	2.94%	8.82%	2.94%	
4.		65	25	8	162	80	disagreed

	Government is committed in the fight against gender based violence.	19.12 %	7.35%	2.35%	47.65%	23.53%	
5.	Government is incorporating community leaders/rural dwellers in the fight against gender based violence	45	15	8	160	112	disagreed
		13.24 %	4.41%	2.35%	47.06%	32.94	

Field work

The above table shows the response of respondents to the items under question 2 (RQ2) on to research the table in frequency and percentage.

In response to item 1 on the table above 110 respondents above 32.35% disagreed that the government of Bayelsa State have responded to cases of gender based violence. 50 respondents strongly disagreed, making about 14.17% of the sample population while 62 respondents about 18.24% and also 28 respondents making 8.24% agreed there is government response to violence against women in the state, and 90 respondents were undecided.

Majority of respondents disagreed that preventive measures put in place have curtailed violence against women. 100 respondents, amounting to about 29.41% of disagreed that preventive measures have curtailed violence against, while 70 respondents strongly disagreed and 20 persons which is about 5.88% were undecided. Though the difference between respondents that disagreed and those that agreed, a total of 150 respondents about 50% of the total sample were of the view that measures put in place by government has curtailed violence against women.

In relation to international and national laws on gender based violence domesticated by the state, a total of 190 (55.88%) respondents agreed these domesticated laws alone cannot prevent violence against women while 100 respondents strongly agreed and 10 were undecided. 30 respondents disagreed, making about 8.82% of the sample and 10 strongly disagreed about 2.94%.

in response to item 5 under research question RQ2, total of 242 respondents which is about 71.18%, are of the view that government is not committed in the fight against gender based violence 65 respondents, about 19.12% and 25 respondents, about 7.35% agreed and strongly agreed that government is committed in the fight against gender based violence.

CONCLUSION

The causes of gender based violence in Nigeria other multidimensional, though some of these causes are ubiquitous while others are peculiar to some political environments alone, the effects are encompassing and cuts across all political environments. International legislations have been put in place to combat gender related violence, which have been domesticated in Nigeria, as well as national and local legislations made, and additional measures to prevent gender based violence, but all of these have not are yet to prevent gender based violence against women in Nigeria and Bayelsa state in particular. It is observed in this study that, the belief system, values and cultural norms have especially made gender based violence difficult to prevent, though the commitment of the governments is also questioned here.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

- i. Obnoxious and inimical cultural practices should be abolished to bring to an end the distribution of roles between men and women
- ii. Government should also establish gender based violence response centers in the local communities, to deter potential offenders
- iii. Deliberate efforts should be put in place to empower women in all localities, to alleviate poverty, which contributes to violence against women in the State.
- iv. Civil Society Organizations should take it upon themselves to enlighten the people on their rights to hold irresponsible and corrupt governments and their officials accountable for their actions.

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We sincerely acknowledge the assistance of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) and the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.