

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Prevalence and Correlates of Gender-based Violence among Female University Students in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a major public health and human rights problem worldwide. The extent of this problem in educational institutions has not been explored in Northern Nigeria. Using self administered questionnaires, we determined the prevalence and risk factors for gender-based violence among 300 female university students in Kano, Northern Nigeria. The overall prevalence of gender-based violence was 58.8% [95% Confidence Interval (CI) = 52.9% to 64.5%]. Specifically, 22.8%, 22.2% and 50.8% of students experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence respectively. Religious affiliation ethnicity, indigeneship, marital status, campus residence and faculty affiliation were significant predictors of GBV. GBV awareness creation programs, legal protection and implementation of an effective redress mechanism are recommended to curb this menace (*Afr J Reprod Health 2011; 15[3]:111-119*).

Résumé

Prévalence et Corrélatés de la violence basée sur le genre au sein des étudiants universitaires: La violence basée sur le genre (VBG) est un gros problème de santé publique et de droits de l'homme partout dans le monde. L'étendue du problème dans les établissements d'enseignement n'a pas été explorée au nord du Nigéria. A l'aide des questionnaires auto-administrés, nous avons déterminé la prévalence de la violence basée sur le genre au sein de 300 étudiantes universitaires à Kano, au nord du Nigéria. La prévalence totale de la violence basé sur le genre était de 58,8% [95% Intervalle de Confiance(IC)=52,9% jusqu'à 64,5%]. En particulier, 22, 8%, 22,2% et 50,8% des étudiants ont vécu les violences physiques, sexuelles et émotionnelles respectivement. L'affiliation, l'ethnicité, l'état civil, la résidence universitaire et l'affiliation à la Faculté étaient des indices de la VBG. Nous préconisons des programmes destinés à la sensibilisation, la protection légale et la mise en œuvre d'un mécanisme de redressement efficace pour freiner ce danger (*Afr J Reprod Health 2011; 15[3]:111-119*).

Keywords: Gender-based violence female university students

Introduction

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is defined by the United Nations (UN) in the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as any act that is likely to or results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats or acts of coercion, arbitrary

deprivation of liberty, private or public, in the family or community.¹ Universities and other higher institutions of learning produce skilled and valued human resources. Graduates have added value if they are not only technically competent but are also disciplined in attitudes, values and behaviors. Students in such institutions are predominantly young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years. Many of them have been raised in patriarchal cultures where their gender

expectations may be in direct contradiction to those encouraged in institutions of higher learning. In addition, the education and training of students take place in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environments where students from different social, economic, gender, age, class and religious backgrounds mix in pursuit of learning. This fact affects the knowledge, expectations, attitudes, behavior, emotional and social intelligence of the students.² Furthermore, campuses tend to be male dominated creating male tolerant cultures and environments.

Economic problems also exert enormous pressures on students making them violent or docile in the face of social challenges. These factors combine to make tertiary institutions hotbeds of deviant gender behaviour with females mostly, but not exclusively, at the receiving end². Such behavioural patterns include sexual harassment and other acts of gender based violence. The outcome of these may include a feeling of insecurity, particularly among female students thereby discouraging them from enrolling in higher institutions and further accentuating the skewed student population in favour of males. Hence, school-related gender-based violence represents a serious obstacle to learning causing not only physical harm but also severe psychological and educational adverse consequences. It poses serious threats and obstacles for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially those related to education and gender equality. GBV predisposes to the creation of an environment favorable to the emergence of cults and gangs to ensure protection on campuses.

Nigeria is Africa's most populated country. Several reports regarding the prevalence of gender-based violence in institutions in the country reveal a high prevalence of gender-based violence. Two recent studies reported that 15% and 27% of young females reported forced penetrative and attempted rape, respectively while 44% reported that they faced unwanted touches^{5, 6}. In another survey in Ondo state in western Nigeria, 27% of school girls stated that their teachers pressured them for sex and 79% stated that they were sexually harassed by male classmates⁷. These reports are predominantly from institutions in the southern part of the country. Little research of similar nature has been conducted in institutions located in the culturally

distinct northern part of the country. Accordingly, we carried out, this study to determine the prevalence of GBV and its subtypes, perpetrators and predictors of its occurrence among female students of Bayero University in Kano, the commercial nerve centre of northern Nigeria. The findings could be used to advocate for gender tolerance and to inform and formulate preventive measures and policies targeted against gender-based violence in institutions of higher learning.

Methods

Setting

The study was conducted at the Bayero University campus. Established in 1975, Bayero University is located in Kano, the administrative capital of Kano State in Northern Nigeria. The university has a total of eight faculties and two schools. The university has an undergraduate student population of 28,548, consisting of 20,379 males (71.4%) and 8,169 females (28.6%). Most of the students come from Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi and Zamfara states. In addition, there are students from other Nigerian states and international students from the Niger Republic, Sudan, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Study design and sample

A cross sectional descriptive study design was used for the survey. A sample size of 300 students was obtained using the hypothesis testing method⁸ and based on prevalence numbers from a previous study⁹ and a level of significance set at 5%. The computed sample size was increased by 10% to account for anticipated subject non-response. A multistage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, four faculties were selected by a one-time ballot from the existing eight. In the second stage, one department was selected from each of the four faculties using simple random sampling. In the third stage, a proportionate number of female students were systematically selected from the departments and approached to participate in the study. Anonymous self-completed questionnaires were administered to those who consented. The survey was conducted during a regular semester session after ethical clearance

from the University and students' consent had been obtained. Respondents were instructed not to write their names on the questionnaire to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Study instrument

A structured interview questionnaire with mostly close-ended questions was adapted from an earlier survey questionnaire.¹⁰ The questionnaire was pretested among students of a department that was not sampled for the study and necessary changes were then implemented. The questionnaire collected information on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and experience of GBV since matriculation. If the participants indicated that they had experienced any form of GBV, further questions were asked to classify the type, perpetrators, consequences and response. Other questions elicited perceived causes and suggested ways of preventing GBV in educational institutions.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using EPI-Info® 6.0 statistical software package (CDC Atlanta, Georgia, USA).¹¹ Quantitative variables were summarized using appropriate measures of location and variability. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Bivariate analysis involved the use of the Chi-square test for assessing the significance of associations between GBV and socio-demographic variables. Crude odds ratios (OR) were obtained using Stat calc®. Multivariate logistic regression was used to compute adjusted ORs and to identify independent predictors of GBV. The level of significance was set at $P < 0.05$.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics

Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 291 were completed and returned giving a response rate of 97%. Uneasiness about the topic was the main reason for non-response. Respondents' age ranged from 18 to 42 years (Mean \pm SD=22.5 \pm 3.2

years). There were 70, 83, 61 and 77 respondents from the faculties of education, law, medicine and social and management sciences respectively. The majority of respondents were of Hausa-Fulani ethnicity (n=209, 71.8%), Muslim (85.2%), and single (n=223, 76.6%). Most respondents (41.2%) are residents of Kano state, the rest were from neighboring states of Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna and other states as shown in Table 1. At the time of

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, Kano, Nigeria, 2010

Characteristics	Frequency No (%)
Age group	
<20	40(13.7)
20-24	92(31.6)
25-29	128(43.9)
≥ 30	31(10.7)
Total	291(100.0)
Marital status	
Single	223(76.6)
Ever Married	68(23.4)
Total	291(100.0)
Faculty	
Education	70(24.1)
Law	83(28.5)
Medicine	61(20.9)
Social & Management sciences	
Total	291(100.0)
Religion	
Islam	248 (85.2)
Christianity	43(14.8)
Total	291 (100.0)
Place of residence	
On campus	113(38.8)
Off campus	178(61.2)
Total	291(100.0)
State of origin	
Kano	120(41.2)
Jigawa	25(8.6)
Katsina	18(6.2)
Kaduna	17(5.8)
Others	111(38.1)
Total	291(100.0)
Ethnicity	
Hausa/Fulani	209(71.8)
Yoruba	22(7.6)
Igbo	10(3.4)
Others	50(17.2)
Total	291(100.0)

the study, a third (33.0%) of the respondents reported ever having sex. The majority of the respondents (n=178, 61.2%) resided off campus, the rest stayed in student hostels. Only 1.4% (n=4) of the respondents were current cigarette smokers. Similarly 6.5% (n=19) imbibed alcohol with 36.8% of them (n=7) of them reporting having been drunk on one or more occasions. Two students reported the recreational use of codeine-containing cough syrups.

Prevalence of gender-based violence

Overall, 171(58.8%) [95% CI= 52.9% to 64.5%] of the respondents admitted having ever experienced one or more forms of gender based violence since joining the university. Of the students who experienced violence, 22.8% (n=66) experienced physical violence, 22.2% (n=62) reported sexual violence and 50.8% (n=134) endured emotional and verbal violence. Table 2 shows that the experience of GBV varied by

Table 2: Prevalence of GBV by socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics P-value	Ever experienced GBV		Total	χ^2
	Yes	No		
Age group				
<20	24(60.0)	16(40.0)	40(100.0)	
20-24	60(65.2)	32(34.8)	92(100.0)	
25-29	68(53.1)	60(46.9)	128(100.0)	
≥30	19(61.3)	12(38.7)	31(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	3.3
				0.35
Marital status				
Single	139(62.3)	84(37.7)	223(100.0)	
Ever Married	32(47.1)	36(52.9)	68(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	5.02
				0.025
Faculty				
Education	38(54.3)	32(45.7)	70(100.0)	
Law	42(50.6)	41(49.4)	83(100.0)	
Medicine	36(59.0)	25(40.9)	61(100.0)	
Social & Management sciences	55(71.4)	22(28.6)	77(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	7.95
				0.047
Religion				
Islam	138(55.6)	110(44.4)	248 (100.0)	
Christianity	33(76.7)	10(23.3)	43(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	6.73
				0.009
Place of residence				
On campus	79(69.9)	34(30.1)	113(100.0)	
Off campus	92(51.7)	86(48.3)	178(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	9.48
				0.002
State of origin				
Kano	59(49.2)	61(50.8)	120(100.0)	
Jigawa	12(48.0)	13(52.0)	25(100.0)	
Katsina	11(61.1)	7(38.9)	18(100.0)	
Kaduna	13(76.5)	4(23.5)	17(100.0)	
Others	76(68.5)	35(31.5)	111(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	12.3
				0.015
Ethnicity				
Hausa/Fulani	112(53.6)	97(46.4)	209(100.0)	
Yoruba	14(63.6)	8(36.4)	22(100.0)	
Igbo	5(50.0)	5(50.0)	10(100.0)	
Others	38(76.0)	12(24.0)	50(100.0)	
Total	171(58.8)	120(41.2)	291(100.0)	8.87
				0.031

socio-demographic characteristics. By age, the prevalence was highest among students in the 20-24 years age bracket and lowest among the age group 25-29. This difference, however, was not statistically significant. Single students were more likely to have experienced GBV compared to those that have ever been married (62.3% vs. 47.1% respectively, $P=0.025$). Law students were least likely (50.6%) to experience violence compared to students from other faculties. In contrast, students from the faculty of social and management sciences were most at risk (71.4%) followed by medical students (59.0%) and students from the faculty of education (54.3%), in decreasing order. By ethnicity, non-Hausa/Fulani students were at increased risk of GBV as shown by a prevalence of 63.6% and 76.0% among Yoruba students and those from other tribes respectively. Nevertheless, Igbo students had the lowest prevalence of 50.0%, although they were quite few in the sample. Muslim students were less likely to experience GBV compared to students belonging to other religious faiths (55.6% vs. 76.7% respectively, $P=0.009$). Differences in experience of GBV by place of residence was also statistically significant, whereby students staying on campus had a prevalence of 69.9% compared to 51.7% among those living outside the university campus ($P=0.002$). Furthermore, there was an increasing trend in GBV prevalence the farther away the student's state of origin was from Kano, with Kaduna state students at a particularly high risk ($P=0.015$).

Physical Violence

Of the 66 students that reported physical violence, 65.2% ($n=43$) were pushed or shoved, 15.2% ($n=10$) were slapped or had objects thrown at them; 7.6% ($n=5$) were choked or burnt, and 12% ($n=8$) were beaten, kicked or dragged. The perpetrators of physical violence were male students ($n=33$, 50.0%), strangers ($n=17$, 25.8%), husbands ($n=8$, 12.1%) and boyfriends ($n=8$, 12.1%). It is noteworthy that none of the students reported physical abuse by lecturers or other officials of the university. Only 6.1% ($n=4$) of the physically abused students reported the incident to

university authorities. Those who did not report the incident ($n=62$) cited ignorance of the redress mechanism ($n=21$, 33.9%), the length of time it took to investigate cases ($n=12$, 19.4%), lack of confidentiality of the process ($n=8$, 12.9%) and fear of stigma ($n=10$, 16.1%) and reprisal attacks ($n=9$, 14.5%) from the perpetrators. The rest were not expecting effective action from authorities ($n=2$, 3.2%).

Sexual Violence

Of the 62 respondents who reported sexual violence since joining Bayero University, 45.2% ($n=28$) faced unwelcome sexual touch; 22.6% ($n=14$) escaped from attempted rape while 3.2% ($n=2$) were raped. Furthermore, 29% ($n=18$) of students were embarrassed by unwanted sexual jokes or comments. Perpetrators of sexual violence include male students other than boyfriends (59.7%); boyfriends (20.9%) and strangers (19.4%). Lecturers and other university officials were not mentioned by the respondents. Less than a quarter ($n=14$, 22.5%) of respondents that were sexually abused informed their families. None reported to the university authorities and reasons given for non-reporting included: not knowing what to do (21.0%); feeling of shame (22.6%); afraid of parents' reaction (8.1%); fear of stigma (37.1%) and reprisal attacks from the perpetrator (11.2%). One of the rape victims had an unwanted pregnancy; three suffered depression, while one attributed poor academic achievement to the sexual abuse she experienced.

Emotional/Verbal Violence

More than half ($n=134$, 50.8%) of the respondents reported enduring verbal/emotional abuse. Up to 37.3% ($n=50$) of the respondents reported being criticized and publicly embarrassed, 31.3% ($n=42$) were verbally insulted, ($n=16$, 11.9%) 11.9% verbally threatened and 19.5% ($n=26$), experienced demeaning remarks. More than three fourths ($n=102$, 76.1%) of victims of emotional/verbal violence were abused by male students; (13.4%) by lecturers; 7.5% by strangers

and the rest (3.0%) by husbands, boyfriends and relatives.

Predictors of GBV

On bivariate analysis, GBV was significantly associated with marital status, religious faith, ethnicity, state of origin, place of residence and faculty of study. These factors remained significant predictors of GBV after adjusting for confounding using multivariate analysis. Single students had more than 50% increased risk of GBV compared to their ever married counterparts. Similarly, students from other Nigerian states had a more than 70% increased risk while those from other ethnic groups had a more than two-fold increased risk of GBV compared to their Hausa-Fulani colleagues. Non-Muslim students had a 40% increased risk compared to Muslim students. Furthermore, students that were campus residents faced a more than 60% increased risk of GBV compared to those who stayed off campus. In the same vein, those in the faculty of social and management sciences had an elevated risk (60%) compared to law students (Table 3).

Perceived reasons for the occurrence of GBV

About half (n=146, 50.2%) of respondents attributed GBV to immodest dressing; more than a third (n=112, 38.5%) attributed it to exchanges for academic and financial favors. Other respondents (n=13, 4.4%) said it was due to alcohol and substance abuse. The rest (n=20, 6.9%) attributed GBV to being tardy to class and late submission of assignments. Regarding means of prevention, nearly half (n=143, 49.1%) of the respondents considered creating awareness among students as a major step in preventing GBV. Others suggested the enactment of laws (n=108, 37.1%); creating awareness among members of the community (n=130, 44.7%) and strengthening clubs and associations (n=23, 7.9%).

Discussion

More than half (58.8%) of the female students in our study experienced one or more forms of gender-based violence since joining the

university. This prevalence is comparable to the figures reported from the recent Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS)¹⁰, but is higher than the prevalence reported from Awassa (46.1%)¹² and Mekelle (46.8%),¹³ both in Ethiopia. Our finding is also higher than what was obtained in a South African school where 50% of students experienced gender-based violence.¹⁴ These variations could be due to differences in methodology and scope of GBV assessment and differences in the socio-cultural characteristics of the study populations.

Table 3: Predictors of GBV among female university students, Kano, Nigeria

Predictor	Crude OR	Adjusted OR (95%CI)	P value
Marital status			
Married*	1.0		
Single	1.86	1.51(1.04-3.34)	0.026
State of Origin			
Kano*	1		
Jigawa	1.05	0.87(0.41-2.70)	0.92
Katsina	1.62	1.23(0.54-5.03)	0.34
Kaduna	1.56	1.31(1.13-2.14)	0.036
Others	2.25	1.74(1.27-3.99)	0.031
Place of Residence			
Off campus*	1.0		
On campus	2.17	1.6(1.28-3.69)	0.027
Ethnicity			
Hausa/Fulani*	1.0		
Yoruba	1.52	1.26(0.57-4.15)	0.37
Igbo	1.15	1.04(0.28-4.77)	0.82
Others	2.74	2.10(1.29-5.90)	0.02
Religion			
Muslims*	1.0		
Christians	2.63	1.40(1.18-5.99)	0.032
Faculty			
Law*	1.0		
Social/Management Sciences	2.44	1.63(1.21-4.96)	0.016
Medicine	1.41	1.27(0.68-2.90)	0.32
Education	1.16	0.81(0.58-2.31)	0.65

*referent category

In the present study, 22.8% of the respondents experienced physical violence. This is comparatively lower than findings from other African countries. For instance, in Uganda 98% of students across five school districts experienced physical violence with 28% of that violence

occurring in school.¹⁵ In another study conducted in Mekelle, Ethiopia, 32.3% of the students reported experiencing at least one form of physical violence since joining college.¹³ Elsewhere, in Chile, a similar proportion (21%) of college students reported at least one episode of physical violence by boyfriends.¹⁶ These differences could be due to differences in cultural characteristics of the study populations, drug and substance abuse in schools and the misuse of the Internet in sharing information about dating culture and violence across the globe.

We found that nearly a quarter of our respondents (22.2%) have been sexually abused since joining the university. Previous Nigerian studies showed that 15% and 27% of young females reported forced penetrative and attempted rape respectively while 44% reported that they faced unwanted touches.^{5,6} In another survey in Ondo state in western Nigeria, 27% of school girls stated that their teachers pressured them for sex and 79% stated they were sexually harassed by male classmates.⁷ The prevalence of sexual violence in the present study is also lower than some global estimates.⁶ When compared to figures of sexual violence reported from other African countries, our prevalence was similar to the figures in Sierra Leone (23%)¹⁷, higher than the figure reported from Cameroun (16%)¹⁸ but lower than those reported from Botswana (67%)^{19,20}; Zimbabwe (65.6%)²¹ and (47%)²²; Ghana (49%)²³ and Ethiopia (34.4%).¹³ In Asia, a study conducted in Hong Kong (25%)²⁵ and Goa, India (33%),²⁶ reported higher figures. In Switzerland, a national survey of females enrolled in schools or professional training programs found that 19% of girls reported sexual abuse while at school.²⁴ Furthermore, in Latin America, the values were inconsistent being lower in Ecuador (22%)²⁷ but higher in Costa Rica (32%).²⁸ Our figures are also lower than findings in the United States where 25% of female students experienced non-consensual sexual contact ranging from kissing and petting to oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse during their college years.²⁹ The American Association of University Women also found that a higher (20-25%) proportion of college women were raped during their college career.³⁰ Apart from differences in socio-cultural practices, drug

use and alcohol use, the reason for the higher prevalence in the US may also be due to varying methodologies and definitions of the behavior covered by the estimates.³¹

Although emotional and verbal violence was found to be the most prevalent (50.8%) of all forms of GBV in our study population, it is still much lower than findings in the Ugandan study in which more than 98% of the students reported experiencing emotional violence, with 21 percent of incidents occurring in school.¹⁴ Despite the high level of violence, only a few suffered consequences of GBV. This may be because most of the victims suffered milder forms of GBV or the majority of the victims had good coping mechanisms. It is of concern however, that one of the victims in our study reported unwanted pregnancy following the incident, raising serious ethical issues for counselors and health care professionals. Luckily, none of the victims had suicidal ideation or attempted/completed suicide, a recognized consequence of GBV in other studies.^{32,33}

Male students were the main culprits in most cases of all three forms of violence, while lecturers were only implicated in emotional violence. This is the case with some studies on violence against girls in schools. For instance, in South Africa, both male students and teachers were complicit in the harassment and abuse of female students.¹³ Studies in Zimbabwe²¹, Ghana²³ and Malawi³⁴ also reported older male students and teachers as perpetrators of sexual violence. A study on GBV in Sierra Leone showed that 27% of students reported that their teachers and lecturers were the perpetrators.¹⁷ In a study conducted in Yaoundé, Cameroon, 30% of the GBV were perpetrated by classmates or other school friends of the victims and about 8% by teachers, family friends, neighbors, and strangers.¹⁸ In another study of 10,000 girls in sub-Saharan Africa, it was found that the majority of the perpetrators of sexual violence were male students.³⁵ The non-involvement of lecturers in the present study may be real or a case of underreporting.

The higher reported prevalence of GBV among non-Muslim students may be associated with mode of dressing and closer interactions with students of the opposite sex. This could be

confounded by the fact that the majority of these students come from other parts of Nigeria where the cultures differ from the host community. Similarly, the higher risk faced by female students who reside on campus may be partly due to freedom from parental control that is associated with being away from home. In addition, the needs of female students living off-campus are more likely to be addressed due to their proximity to their families hence reducing their likelihood of being abused in exchange for money.

The higher risk of GBV among single students could be explained by the lower likelihood of married female students dating their peers or associating or mingling with male students as freely as single students. The fear (by perpetrators) of repercussions or legal actions by their spouses may also serve as deterrent.

This study had several limitations. First, our study was conducted in a single tertiary institution in Northern Nigeria. Similar institutions in the northern part of the country may share some of its characteristics but they are by no means homogeneous and so there is the need to exercise caution in generalizing our findings to all universities in Northern Nigeria. The prevalence of GBV may vary with the predominant cultural characteristics of the host community in which each university is located. More so, our findings cannot be extrapolated to the general population due to the highly selective nature of our study population. Female university students are highly educated and mostly come from middle or higher social classes. Secondly, responses to personal matters of a sexual nature may elicit socially acceptable responses and fear of perpetrators of GBV may lead to under reporting; similarly the age and gender of interviewers are known to affect the nature of responses obtained.³⁶ We minimized these by removing all self-identifying information, self-completion of questionnaire, questionnaire distribution by respondents' peers and requesting that completed questionnaires be dropped in boxes.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that there is a high prevalence of GBV in our study institution in Northern Nigeria. The most common form of GBV was emotional and verbal violence mainly

perpetrated by male students and lecturers. The risk factors for GBV revolve around socio-demographic and environmental characteristics (marital status, religious faith, ethnicity, state of origin, place of residence, faculty of study) which modulate social interactions between female students and other males on campus. It is therefore important for university authorities and other stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, to develop and implement risk-reduction and health-promotion programs directing efforts at making campuses safer through appropriate no-tolerance policies, effective redress mechanism and improved counseling of victims of GBV.

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