

Religious Approaches to Preventing Gender Violence and Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of religious approaches to preventing gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria. It first of all makes clarification of certain key concepts used in this paper. These include religious approaches, gender violence and sexual abuse. The paper makes a review of gender violence and sexual abuses in Nigeria. The paper also discusses the possible means religion can adopt in prevention of gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria. The paper utilized inter-disciplinary method in gathering information. Findings from the research revealed that sexual abuse and gender violence is endemic in Nigerian society. The paper recommends among others, that the government should formulate policies that would both guide against sexual harassment and gender violence as well as empowers women to participate actively in the formulation of policies and governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender Violence, Sexual Abuse, Religious Approach and Nigeria

Introduction

Gender violence and sexual abuse are vices that affect mankind globally today. In many parts of the world, including Nigeria gender violence and sexual abuse have both theological and cultural roots that date back to the origin of mankind (Angagbu, 1979). The theological root of gender violence and sexual abuse in many parts of the world is evidence in male domination over the female counterparts. In Nigeria for example, researches carried out by scholar's shows a high percentage of abuse by male counterparts. Women are regarded as second class or subordinate group who in most cases are dehumanized and sexually abused by men. Bella (1970) affirmed that the subjugation of women in most parts of the world is based on the social, economic and political status and the roles performed by women in the society. Although women are said to be reproduced by socialization process in many parts of the world, the Nigerian case is a harmonious balance between the male and female sexes. The Nigerian people considered equality between men and women as ordained by God for the unity of creatures created by him.

In some cultures of Africa, there are prejudices, negative attitudes and customs that negate the equality of men and women. Those who follow the gender inequality school of thought argues that even in family setting, socialization contributes significantly to inferiority of female to male counterparts (Bella, 1970). According to this school of thought women are weaker sex by nature and as such cannot be equated with men. This philosophy of reducing the status of women to subordinate group makes their actions seemingly innocuous and psychologically dehumanized them. It also impedes them from engaging themselves in hard works, especially as many people doubt their capabilities or look down on women in performing tougher functions in the society. This denial of women rights and participation in the development of the society has both economic and political implications on the larger society, and Nigeria is not an exception. The discrimination against women has dimensions which include gender violence and sexual abuse which makes male counterparts impossible to contribute their worth.

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The systematic exclusion of Nigerian women from the development agenda degenerate into gender violence and sexual abuse in all ramifications. This paper therefore, highlights the religious approaches to preventing gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria. The paper calls for a change of world view of Nigerian people concerning gender issues, especially gender violence and sexual abuse, especially of women in contemporary times.

Conceptual Clarifications

The key concepts that need clarifications are gender violence, sexual abuse and religious approach.

Gender Violence

The word gender comes from the Middle English *gender*, a loanword from Norman-conquest-era Old French. This, in turn, came from Latin *genus*. Both words mean 'kind', 'type', or 'sort'. They derive ultimately from a widely attested Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root which is also the source of *kin*, *kind*, *king*, and many other English words (Atojoko, 2000). It appears in Modern French in the word *genre* (type, kind, also *genre sexual* and is related to the Greek root *gen* to produce, appearing in *gene*, *genesis*, and *oxygen*. As a verb, it means *breed* in the King James Bible. Gender discrimination (also known as gender inequality, gender egalitarianism, or sexual inequality) therefore refers to the sex discrimination stemming from a belief in the injustice of myriad forms of gender inequality. The word *violence* on the other hand denotes any kind of behaviour that one person uses to control another through fear and intimidation (Della, 2003). It includes emotional and psychological abuse, battering, sexual assault and acid attacks (Uchem, 2000). Gender violence against women refers to all forms of inhuman conditions targeted at a particular sex such as oppressions, adverse conditions and inhuman treatments against women or womanhood (Blood & Wolf, 1994:30-35). In the context of this paper therefore, gender violence can be defined as: Any act of gender violence that results in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life. It encompasses physical, sexual and psychological evidence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female mutilation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institution, in religious worship and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution (ECA-WIDNET, 1997).

The harmful effects of these violence result in the humiliation, open ridicule and torture of women in Nigerian society (Nwocha, 2000). The lacks of laws that prohibit violence against women and the failure to enforce or promote awareness of existing laws have been detrimental to the protection of women or men against acts of brutality. Lack of sensitivity towards women or men in the media has adverse impacts on teenage girls who in most cases fall victims of rape or adoption by their male counterparts in many cultures of Nigerian society. There are dehumanizing cultural practices such as widowhood rites and female genital mutilation that are acts of violence against women. Available statistics gathered by the Murphy, (1997) indicates that in Nigeria one out of every three women has suffered violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This statics is an average based on available national surveys across industrialized and developing countries.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse refers to sexual activity where consent is not obtained or freely given (John Paul II). The National Centre on Elder Abuse describes sexual violence as "the abuse of sex and "non-consenting sexual contact of any kind" including unwanted touching; sexual assault or battery, such as rape, sodomy, and coerced nudity; sexually explicit photographing; and sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent. ²Jurisdictions and agencies define "elder" differently but typically as commencing at the age of 60 or 65 (Oduyoye, 1996). The victims who experience sexual abuse are mostly female. The person responsible for the violence is typically male and is usually someone known to the victim. The person can be, but is not limited to, a friend, co-worker, neighbour, or family member. There are many types of sexual abuse. Not all include physical contact between the victim and the perpetrator (person who harms someone else) – for example, sexual harassment, threats, and peeping. Other sexual abuse, including unwanted touching and rape, includes physical contact. Sexual abuse can impact health in many ways. Some ways are serious and can lead to long-term health problems. These include chronic pain, headaches, stomach problems, and sexually transmitted diseases (Atado, 1991). Sexual abuse can have an emotional impact as well. Victims often are fearful and anxious. They may replay the attack over and over in their minds. They may have problems with trust and be wary of becoming involved with others. The anger and stress that victims feel may lead to eating disorders and depression. Some even think about or attempt suicide. Sexual abuse is linked to sexual violence and negative health behaviours.

For example, victims are more likely to smoke; abuse alcohol, use drugs, and engage in risky sexual activity. Sexual violence is a significant problem in Africa and United States. Among high school students surveyed nationwide, about 8% reported having been forced to have sex. The percentage of those having been forced to ever have sex was higher among female (11%) than male (5%) students. An estimated 20% to 25% of college women in the United States have experienced an attempted or complete rape during their college career. Nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men in the United States have been raped at some time in their lives. These numbers underestimate the problem. Many cases are not reported because victims are afraid to tell the police, friends, or family about the abuse (Bothwell, 1983). Victims also think that their stories of abuse will not be believed and that police cannot help them. They may be ashamed or embarrassed. Victims may also keep quiet because they have been threatened with further harm if they tell anyone. Certain factors can increase the risk for sexual abuse. However, the presence of these factors does not mean that sexual abuse will occur. Risk factors for perpetration (harm to someone else) include:

1. Being male
2. Having friends that are sexually aggressive
3. Witnessing or experiencing violence as a child
4. Alcohol or drug use
5. Being exposed to social norms, or shared beliefs, that support sexual violence (Sukhdeo, 2006).

Sexual abuse can affect individuals across the lifespan, including people in later life. Many older victims have survived multiple victimizations over the course of their lives. Recognition of sexual abuse against people in later life is hindered by misconceptions that older adults are not sexual beings or sexually desirable and that rape is a crime of passion. A high percentage of victims experience significant health problems and disabilities that increase vulnerability and reduce help seeking. Due to age-related physiological changes, older victims tend to sustain more serious physical and psychosocial injuries during an assault than younger victims. Some of the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse against people in later life include:

- a. Genital injuries, human bite marks, imprint injuries, and bruising on thighs, buttocks, breasts, face, neck, and other areas.
- b. Fear, anxiety, mistrust, and dramatic changes in victims' behaviour.
- c. Eyewitness reports and disclosures by victims.
- d. Observed suspicious behaviour of perpetrators by others.
- e. It is likely that sexual abuse against people in later life is highly underreported. Many barriers impede the effective response and prevention of sexual abuse against older victims including
 - i. Social stigma and barriers preventing individuals from discussing sexual activities or sexual abuse openly.
 - ii. Disabling conditions that interfere with making reports.
 - iii. Victim's fear of further harm.
 - iv. Victim's reluctance to report, especially if perpetrator is a family member
 - v. Misinterpretation of disclosure as part of dementia and of physical evidence as "normal" markings on an older body.
 - vi. Delayed medical and police assistance and contamination of physical evidence (Hutchinson, 1998).

These signs and symptoms are commonly found among victims of sexually abused genders worldwide.

Religious Approach

The term religion is not easy to define. This difficulty stems from the changing nature of the subject which makes it impossible for one definition to cater for all aspects of religion. According to Ekpo (1999), religion is an attitude of the mind which covers motives and beliefs that are expressed in the acts of worship such as prayers and rituals. Nigolian (1975), describes religion in terms of beliefs, feelings and conduct. Idowu (1973), believes that religion in its essence is the means by which God as spirit and man's essential self-communicate. For Anyanwu (1999), religion has to do with man's relationship to the unseen world. A synthesis of the various definitions shows that religion is man's interaction with the supernatural forces. In Nigeria, this interaction can be through the traditional religious rites, the Muslim beliefs or the Christian practices (Udofia, 1999). The word approach on the other hand connotes a method of explaining and interpreting historical events that has taken place in the society.

Religious approach therefore refers to a systematic presentation of religious events or historical facts by describing its major tenets as found in different African societies (Ikenga-Metuh, 1984). The religious approach centres on the main items of belief and practices common to most African societies-gender, sexuality and the system of morality. However, variations and divergences of the world views are pointed out where they exist.

An Overview of Gender Violence and Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

Gender violence and sexual abuse are common evil acts that have characterized the Nigerian society in modern times. They are evil acts that affect mostly women in Nigerian society. These practices have both cultural and educational roots that are linked to race, tribe, sex and language, thereby lowering the status of women. There are those who argue that gender violence and sexual abuse against women has its roots from the creation account where a woman was fashioned out of man's rib for the purpose of procreation. This school of thought vehemently opposed to the possession of woman in the full human nature with man. While other scholars upheld the view of human equality of men and women in full identical nature created in the image of God. These two contrarily views however, poses the problem of gender violence and sexual abuse among human beings in the society. There are traditionalists who proposed gender inequality of women in Nigerian society. In their view points, women are subordinate to men because they were created out of men's ribs and as such they are property of the men (Ushe, 2010). This outmoded notion about women still exists in many cultures of Nigerian society. These false beliefs include: A man has right over the body of woman, every woman must depend on a male provider, and that it is a waste of time educating women since they get married and so forth. Nigerian traditions and religions also teach women to stick to their husbands, to be subordinate to their husbands, to be patient and to endure everything so as to save their families (Eph. 5:15-24).

In many Nigerian cultures, women have inadequate legal protections because issues involving husbands and wives are culturally considered "private" and hence, no one would like to interfere in the private affairs of home (Mutanga, 2004). Even the customary laws have their limitations. In most cases customary law, dowry land ownership, inheritance and naming of children discriminate against women in Nigerian society. This sometimes leads to violence, disfigurements, abuses, lost opportunities and interference with confidence of women in the society at large. The consequences of these are that the women may fly into rage and isolate themselves from male counterparts. Many of them may even think that men are meant to dominate and control women (Kratcoski, 2003). Gender violence and sexual abuse occurs both in the families, religious institutions, work places and educational institutions in Nigerian society. They are committed mostly against women and have great impacts on their social status in the society. Gender violence and sexual abuse take place in three major forms: physical violence, sexual abuse and psychological violence. These forms of violence cut across racial, cultural and religious backgrounds. According to Amnesty International (2010) violence on a spouse; children and siblings have been described as symptomatic breakdown of social control. Amnesty International in its publication, reported that nearly two-thirds of women in Nigeria are believed to have experienced physical and psychological violence as well as sexual abuse (Nimeh, 2000).

Women are often beaten and punished by men for supposed transgressions. Some of them are raped and even murdered by men. In some cases, vicious acid attacks leave women with horrific disfigurements (Afro-News, 2010). Gender violence and sexual abuse are frequently excused and tolerated in some societies where women are assigned inferior roles, subordinate to the male who are heads of the families. They are looked upon as properties of their husbands (Anozie, 2010). Many husbands are responsible for most of the violence against their wives and these evil acts affect them to a larger degree. In Nigeria gender violence sexual abuse affects everybody, including children who are traumatized by the abuse. They both have broader spectrum which includes child abuse, elder abuse and violent acts between family members (Akpan, 2000). Gender violence and sexual abuse consist of many types such as spouse/partner abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, parent abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, social abuse, stalking, physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. This violence is perpetuated by persons, systems and structures created and operated by human beings (Dayo, 1990). This clearly shows that there is a personal and systematic, structural and institutional dimension of the problem. There are two sides to the problem: why men harass women sexually and why women seem to accept the beating and stay. Psychologists and domestic violence counsellors explain that violence is learned behaviour. In many cases, men who become abusive and women who are abused grew up in homes where violence occurred. In such a situation, a child can grow up believing that violence is acceptable behaviour. Many boys may learn that this is a way to be powerful (Godsmith, 1992). if a boy child rose in a home with physical violence and sexual abuse; he is more likely to use violence and sexual abuse in his own family (Gelles, 1997). On the other hand, some psychiatrics hold that only very small percentage of cases indicates psychological disorder triggered sexual violent behaviour.

However, in majority of cases, other reasons can explain men's abusive behaviour. Men who abuse women convince themselves that they have the rights to do so. Abusive men tend to be extremely jealous, possessive and easily angered (Egwu, 2001). Many flew into a rage because their spouse called her mother too often or because she did not fulfil his expectation in a particular area, and may try to isolate their wives by limiting their contact with their families and friends. These kinds of men have low self-esteem and feel vulnerable and powerless. They are more likely to have experienced violence in childhood, and pin the blame for their abusive behaviours on someone or something other than themselves. Alcohol is a strong contributory factor in many cases of domestic violence in Nigeria. Many women stay with their abusive partners and the seeds for sexual abuse is sown early in the women's lives. In many Nigerian societies, violence and sexual abuse begins even before the abusers are born. Female children are implicitly rejected by their families' quest for male child. The women do not seem to be of value enough as to stand on their own dignity and insist on being respected (Ushe, 2010). Sometimes, religious teachings bind women into accepting humiliation as if it is the same as the Christian virtue of humanity (Oguonu, 2005). Women often blame themselves for acts committed against them instead of recognizing that no one deserves violence and sexual abuses. Because of the social belief that it is culturally permissible for a husband to beat up or sexually abuse his wife or a father to beat his children, women are taught not to complain against their husbands in Nigerian society. After a long time of being or sexual abuse, women may become accustomed to it and fearful and therefore unable to take steps to leave the situation of abuse. Most of them do not know that there is sometimes a possibility of gathering justice from the police or the courts (Rothblum & Cole, 1990).

Gender violence and sexual abuse can say to be physical brutality by men against women when they are not treated with love and care. This may be in form of rape and violation of their sexual rights (Tomaseski, 1993). Rape subjugates the women, robs them of their dignity and mocks them in the face of society (Us Bishops, 1992). The atrocity when committed in front of the man as an instrument of violence against women, further deepens the pain. Most often this is done by men to show their superiority over the women. The trauma and stigma often haunt the women for the rest of their lives. Many Nigerian societies consider women to be inferior and weak, while the men are given the credits as the decision makers (John Paul II, 1981). This wrong conception of women and violation of their human rights by Nigerians originated from considering them as lower class to men (Kisembo, Magesa & Shorter, 1998). The belief is also rooted in patriarchy where the power and rule of the fathers or men through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, education, and the division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male (Adesanya, 1973). This philosophical thought socializes women to remain "silent" and in most cases promotes social inequalities between men and women. This leads to women's subordination not only within the family but also in the society and in the church as a whole (Andrian, 1978). Female circumcision is the worst form of gender violence and it has root in ancient culture and religious practices of African people, especially the western part of the continent. Blood and Wolf assert that the practice is most prevalent among the Nigerian people such as Ogun, Niger, Rivers and Borno States female genital mutilation cases are high with a prevalence rate of 95.7 percent, 93.3 and 82.6 respectively (UNIFEM, 2002). Kebbi State records the least number of cases of female genital mutilations with only 0.2 percent prevalence (Zierler, Witbeck & Mayer, 1996).

According to a study carried out by the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF), the practice of female genital mutilation is generally low in the Northern States like Adamawa, Kogi and Yobe, recording 1.0 percent, 1.1 percent and 0.0 percent prevalence rate respectively, while southern states like Delta, Cross River, Imo and Anambra State have very high number of female genital mutilation cases (Cutrufelli, 1983). Gender violence and sexual abuse subjects the women to emotional and psychological tortures leading to frustrations or even death. In many cultures of Nigeria, widows are mostly victims of those who suffer psychological violence. Sometimes, the widows are subjected to a number of oppressive and dehumanizing treatments. These includes compelling them to perform burial rituals like sleeping on bare floor, wear rags, eating food from broken, unwashed plates, by not taking bath for several days or weeks, forcing the widow to drink water that was used in washing the late husband's corpse, by taking the oath publicly to prove her innocence of not been responsible for the husband's death, by losing her rights to the deceased husband's property and by exercising her from the society if she refuses to take the oath or drink the water used in washing the husband's corpse.

The widow is also subjected to other psychological tortures and expected to mourn her husband's death for a period of time and throughout this period she must wear dresses that depicted their mood of mourning (Hardon, 1981). During the mourning period, the widow wore black clothes and she is not permitted to do things such as: to step out of the house for forty days, to cook and to touch any food meant for another member of the family. The widow is seen as unclean until she has undergone all the relevant traditional rites. In Calabar, Cross River state, widows have no rights to their husband's estate. A widow who remarries forfeits the right to her husband's property. Although the customary law which governs most marriages in Nigeria forbids the married wife from owning property of the deceased husband, many Nigerian women have condemned this practice in strong terms. Islamic marriages thus, confer more rights to the husband's properties than customary marriages. In Islamic law, a widow is entitled to one quarter of the deceased husband's property. But if the deceased has children and grand-children, the widow would be entitled to one-eighth of the property (Ushe, 2010). On the contrary, since Christian marriages are governed by statutory laws which guarantee some measures of legal equality in respect to property ownership most Nigerian societies usually invoke customary laws to inherit the property of the deceased (Ushe, 2007). The above facts indicates that in Nigeria, gender violence and sexual abuse acts such as marital rape, adoption, sexual harassment at work, within educational institutions or religious institutions, child marriage, forced prostitution and trafficking in women are harmful traditional practices that violate the fundamental human rights of women and limits the development of their capabilities and integration into the society's development process. Although, early marriage and forced marriage enjoys legal backing in Sharia Law as practiced in Northern Nigeria and among some Muslim communities of South-Western Nigeria, they reveals the low status to which women and young girls have been relegated in Nigerian society.

The wide spread assumption that women have no alternative roles other than housekeeping and child-bearing is wrong and should be corrected (Watts, 1991). According to the civil liberty organization study, most parents give out their daughters for early marriages because they want to protect family honour by preventing teenage pregnancy. Thus, they would rather give their daughters out in marriage early to avoid having to waste money on their education or to earn money for their dowry. And since there is yet no known law to check the harmful practice of early marriage, many young girls fell victims of such practices in many societies of the world today, including Nigeria.

Causes of Gender Violence and Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

There are many causes of gender violence and sexual abuse in the world, especially Nigeria today. Notably among them are:

- (i) The unequal relationship between men and women in the society and the church. By nature, our being male and female has no intrinsic hierarchy. What we call women's place in one human culture is man's place in another. There is nothing permanent about human beings as culturally defined. Neither men nor women should be tied to predetermined roles. Women are often violated upon when defined by their sexual abuse and rational roles only, while prominence is given to other adventurers or masculine roles for men (Gelles & Cote, 1999). The same thing goes for the many proverbs and metaphors, generalizations and stereo types that idealize women (Giddens, 1992).
- (ii) When a man feels the need to control and dominate the woman. When the husband feels such need to control his wife because of low self-esteem, extreme jealousy, difficulty in regulating his anger and other strong emotions, or when he feels inferior to his wife in education and socio-economic background, he employs violence as a tool. Some men with traditional beliefs may think they have the right to control women, and that women are not equal to men (Erinosho, 2004). This domination takes the form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse.
- (iii) Interaction of situational and individual factors. This means that abusers learn violent behaviours from their family, people in their community and other cultural influences as they grow up. They may have seen violence often or they may have been victims themselves. Such abusers may learn to believe that violence is a reasonable way of controlling a woman (Einarsdothir, 2002). Thus, men who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and who see sexual abuse and gender violence directed against women are more likely to abuse when (Zamani, 2003). Women who also witness violence against women in their families of origin are more likely to be victimized by their own husbands (Tenuche, 2004).

- (iv) Poor communication between couples. Sexual abuse and gender violence arose from poor communication between married couples. According to Zamani the inability to share thoughts and feelings or solicit each other understands on matters of personal idiosyncrasies, gives rise to conflict, marital disharmony, undue suspicion or promotion of malice between them (Adsina, 1983). At the slightest provocation, sexual abuse and gender violence erupts and deals a severe blow to the hitherto blissful marital relationship.
- (v) Immaturity on the part of man or both couples. Immaturity of couples also instigates gender violence and sexual abuse between them due to lack of appropriate problem-solving and decision-making skills.

As immature personalities they misinterpret each other's action or pronouncement. They may resort to heated arguments, rather than meaningful dialogue to resolve their differences, most often than not, these degenerate into gender violence, sexual denials, among others. This can threatened marital harmony and affect the relationship between men and women in the society (Danfulani & Lawrence, 2004). Thus, the effects of violence against women are broadly grouped into three: Physical, psychological and spiritual impacts.

Physical Impact

Physical impact has to do with injuries which can lead to permanent disabilities in women or even leads to death of a woman. Sometimes, physical violence on a woman can lead to miscarriage of forced abortion and unwanted pregnancies. Sexual abuse against women increases women's vulnerability to STD and HIV/AIDS (Ikejimi, 1971). Some victims of violence often time than not commit suicide. Many women die following a beating by their own husbands, and in most cases, the husband's free afterwards. The husband's who are taken to court are not given an adequate sentence for having killed a person. In the case of sexual violation, it may precondition the women to turn to prostitution, to become violent, have too many children, abuse alcohol or drug, leave the home, and in the case of widows, lose all the property (Ilori, 2002).

Psychological Impact

The psychological intense fear that the violence will happen again is generated in the woman. Low self-esteem, guilt, shame and depression also result; like wish feelings of being unjustly treated and helpless. There may be accompanied by feelings of hatred and the desire for revenge.

Spiritual Impact

Women experience a hunger for human and spiritual understanding and care, a Christ-like acceptance and support. They feel not appreciated in the society and not recognized in the church but rather exploited (Ugwu, 2002). In this case of girl-children, on the whole it may lead disfigurement, lost opportunities, and interference with school work. They may lose confidence in themselves and in death and adults. As young, women may also avoid marriage. When the woman is a mother and the violence takes place in front of her children, the stage is set for a cycle of violence that may be continued from generation. The children witnessing violence against their mother may grow up thinking that violence against women is normal, thereby perpetuating another generation of violence in Nigerian society (Agbasiere, 2000).

Religious Approach to Preventing Gender Violence and Sexual Abuse in Nigeria

There are many religious approaches to preventing gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria. These approaches include:

i. Liberation Theology

Liberation theology has the force of eradicating gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society. Ugwu (2002) asserts that liberation theologians, liberation theologians in many parts of the world, especially women liberation theologians and feminist's theologians in recent times condemned the violence and sexual abuse against women in global society. Malatest (2002) collaborated that gender equality is a vital force in preventing gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society. It is social machinery without which the social protection against gender violence and sexual abuse in modern civilization would have been impossible. Liberation theology has the duty of edifying the people's culture and belief systems to discourage gender violence and sexual abuse in the society. All religions whether revealed or non-revealed are opposed to gender violence and sexual abuse.

Our ignorance about liberation theology and feminist theology are potent factors responsible for gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society. Since liberation theology promotes gender equality and peaceful co-existence among members in the society, it will be unwise for anyone to ignore the influence of liberation theology as vital force for eradicating gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society (May & Aikman, 2003).

ii. Religious Teachings

All religions have clear stands on the treatment of women. Both Islam and Christianity teach that men and women are created equal by God. Equality of all sexes enhances self understanding and rationality of male and female counterparts and so psychologically guaranteed a healthy relationship between them. The Holy Books (Qur'an and the Bible) should be taught in such way that it will effectively promote cordial relationship and unity of purpose between men and women in Nigerian society. By so doing, gender violence and sexual abuse can be eradicated in the society.

iii. Inculturation

The process of inculturation can also eradicate gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society. This can be done by refining Nigerian traditional worldview of women as subordinate and second class citizens of the society. The cultural view that women are property of men for production of children and weaker sexes could be contextualized into Christian view of men and women equality.

iv. Promotion of Women's Rights

Human right is the compendium of human existence. Hence, women should be given their due rights. Women have the dignity which should be respected by the government and the society. The government should on his own part, promulgate into law declarations, conventions and resolutions on women's rights where the laws of the land do not or make offences against women. Religious agencies and non-governmental organizations such as National Orientation Agency, Win and Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative's (WRAPA) should as their primary missions improve the social welfare-and legal rights of Nigerian women, by removing various forms of deprivations, discriminations and degradation that make it difficult for women to contribute rightfully to national development. There is need for scholars, religionists, traditional and religious leaders to take phenomenological and non-violence approaches to eradication of gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria.

These religious approaches should be based on traditional moral values, communication and dialogue, love, mutual respect and collegiality spirit to eradicate sexual abuse and gender violence. Any religious leaders or traditions that seek inequality, and promote sexual abuse and gender violence are unforgivable and should be discarded in all ramifications as crime against women. Those who are engaged in education of the Youths and in moulding of public opinions should promote gender equality. This is the only path possible where justice, solidarity, universal brotherhood and sisterhood could be achieved. All religions affirmed the fact that men and women were created equal. Christianity for example, maintains that men and women were created in the image of God to multiply and fill the earth. The book of Genesis 1:27 states thus: "God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female, he created them. This identical human nature which appears in the two different forms of male and female indicates that women possess equal human nature perfectly to men before the creator. As a sovereign being, women are not subordinate to man more than they subordinate to them; they are free and independent as the men. Pope John Paul II (1981) asserts that both men and women are human beings to equal degree. The women have full and equal human rights and role both politically, economically, culturally and ecclesial as benefits the human persons. All women and men are individuals worthy of respect and dignity even in terms of sexual rights. Jesus unflinchingly respected the human dignity of women and went off his way to help the most vulnerable women.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is clearly seen that gender violence and sexual abuse are social vices that are endemic in the world today. Gender violence and sexual abuse whether directly or indirectly, are crimes against human dignity and thus, dehumanizes the status of women. Although it is argued that women are not the only targets of gender violence and sexual abuse in the Nigerian society. The number of cases of gender violence and sexual abuse of women seems to be more than that of men. Just as many ladies are humiliated by their husbands, more men die every year in cases of domestic violence. Some of the women poison their husband's food, beat them up or cut off their husband's genital while they were fast asleep. This shows that violence and sexual abuse are not strictly gender issues. Both men and women fall victims of gender violence and sexual abuse in the modern society and the case of Nigeria is not an exception.

In view of the above discussion, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- (i) The government should established psychological and professional units at the relevant centres to educate people on the consequences of gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigerian society.
- (ii) The government should enact laws that would seriously check the menace of gender violence and sexual abuse in Nigeria and other parts of the world where it is not visible.
- (iii) Leaders of different religious institutions should uphold gender equality and de-emphasised gender violence and sexual abuse in the society.
- (iv) The various religions in Nigeria (Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion) should advocate for women's proper recognition by the society and in religious organizations in such a manner that equal opportunities are given to both men and women for the contribution and transformation of the society.
- (v) There is need for dialogue and non-violence approach in promoting gender equality in the global society.

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