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Implication of Gender-Based Violence on Public Discourse in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract: Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been widely seen as one of the major challenges in today's society causing public disorder generally and in Akwa Ibom State, specifically. Several cases of GBV have been reported in the state which has raise alarm. Despite the efforts by the government, NGOs and civil society to curb the menace, GBV keeps increasing and manifesting in different ways. This study was therefore conducted to assess the implications of GBV on public disorder in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve this objective, descriptive research design was adopted and data was obtained from secondary source. It was revealed that the Akwa Ibom State is handling GBV cases through the Ministry of Justice using the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law, passed on 10th June, 2019 and assented to on 19th June, 2020 by Governor Udom Emmanuel. It was found that key stakeholders are not adequately equipped; the VAPP Law is still not comprehensive to cover some critical areas of GBV; there is still lack of free protective and legal aid for GBV survivors; Many citizens, especially those at the rural areas still lack knowledge of the existence of laws on GBV related issues; the economic opportunities provided for women are not enough to make them independent. These posed great challenges in handling GBV cases in Akwa Ibom State. It was concluded that twisted traditional practices or beliefs that encourage GBV need to be overhauled by creating a purpose driven framework. Thus, it was recommended among other things that for the efforts of the government in combating GBV in the state to be sustained, key stakeholders

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such as the police especially, including traditional rulers, youth and women leaders, religious leaders, community health workers, men and boys, community health workers, faith-based groups and NGOs that are playing significant roles in GBV prevention should be adequately equipped.

Keywords: Disorder Gender, Implications, Public, Violence.

Introduction

Being a social phenomenon that is based on gender inequality, gender-based violence (GBV) has become one of the most popular human rights violations worldwide. The World Bank (2019) reported that about 35% of women in the world have experienced physical or sexual violence either from intimate partner or non-partner; 7% of women in the world have been victims of sexual assault by someone other than a partner; 38% of murders of women in the world are committed by an intimate partner; while 200 million women have experienced female mutilation /cutting. Similarly, European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), reported that at least 1 in 3 women has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence; 1 in 20 women has been a victim of rape; 1 in 2 women has experienced sexual harassment; 1 in 5 women has experienced stalking; and 95% of victims trafficked for sexual exploration in European Union are women.

Furthermore, World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) reported that about 30% (1 in 3) of women in the world have been subjected to either physical and or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetime, with most of these victims being women aged 15-49 years. Also, the prevalence estimates of lifetime partner violence range 20% in the Western pacific, 22% in high income countries and Europe and

25% in the WHO regions of Americas to 33% in the WHO African region, 31% in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, and 33% in the WHO South-East Asia region. In addition, 27% of women and girls within the age range of 15 and 49 globally have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partners. This rate is higher in emergencies, conflict, and crisis situations, where vulnerability and risks are increased and most often family, community, and legal protections have broken down. All these figures are indications that gender base violence is a global problem. These negative impacts of GBV have been of great concern to governments globally.

World Bank Group (2019) defines gender-based violence (GBV) as an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It refers to violence directed at individuals based on their gender and encompasses a range of abuses including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm, as well as harmful traditional practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), GBV often affects women and girls disproportionately due to entrenched gender discriminatory norms and a pervasive culture of impunity (Nigerian

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Voice, Jan. 2024). GBV affects both men and women, but women are much more vulnerable because violence reflects and reinforces existing gender inequalities (World Bank Group, 2019).

On the other hand, public disorder can be seen as a substantial interference with the public peace (e.g. GBV – gender-based violence) that constitutes a significant threat to the health and safety of the people. In recent years, gender based violence (GBV) has become a pervasive issue of global concern because of its wide coverage of persons' abuses such as physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm, which in turn, cause public disorder.

Sexual violence is a significant aspect of GBV that involves sexual exploitation, forced sexual activity, and other forms of sexual coercion. A study conducted by the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018) revealed that 31.5% of women in Nigeria have experienced sexual violence. Specific to Akwa Ibom State, the prevalence rate of sexual violence is alarmingly high, with the state being ranked third in the country for the highest incidence of rape (Punch 2020). A study by Johnson (2013) revealed a high prevalence of sexual violence in Nigeria, with the situation in Akwa Ibom State being of particular concern. The key constructs in this variable include incidents of rape, forced penetration, and verbal sexual harassment. A study by Okon (2023) found that 53.5% of women in the state had experienced one form of sexual violence. This high prevalence linked to cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality and condone violence against women.

Physical violence is another critical component of GBV that includes acts that cause physical harm or suffering, such as hitting, slapping or causing injury with a weapon (WHO, 2013). A study by Victor (2022) found that domestic physical violence is prevalent in Akwa Ibom State, which is most times, caused by factors such as low socio-economic status and low educational attainment. National population commission (NPC) (2022) also reveals that 44.3% of women in the state have experienced physical violence.

Emotional violence is also a form of GBV that includes harmful acts such as blackmail, humiliation, threats, control, isolation, verbal abuse, intimidation, and manipulation, which can have long-lasting psychological effects on survivors (Umoh, 2024). A study by Umoh (2024) found that emotional violence is pervasive in Akwa Ibom State and 39.7% of women in Akwa Ibom State had experienced emotional violence. The study also found that women who were married or in a relationship experience emotional violence more than others that are not in any relationship or are independent.

However, these studies provide a general perspective on the state of GBV in Akwa Ibom State. For instance, studies by Okon (20223), Johnson (2023) and NDHS (2018) examined the prevalence of GBV in Akwa Ibom State, but their focus was on sexual violence, with emotional and physical violence being overlooked. While studies by Victor (2022) and National Population Commission (NPC) (2022) focused on physical violence, Umoh (2024) focused on emotional violence. Moreover, they do not provide a comprehensive analysis on the

implementations of GBV on public disorder in Akwa Ibom State. This study therefore aims to fill this gap.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The danger of GBV is pervasive and has contributed immensely to the end of childhood for millions of children around the world. This is shown by staggering global figures: (a) 15 million girls in all countries are married before the age of 18 each year; (b) 30 million girls in all countries are at risk of female mutilation in the next decade; (c) 1 in 3 girls and women live in countries where marital rape is not an explicit crime (Umoh, 2024). Every woman/girl and man/boy deserves to grow up and live freely from harm. Yet GBV continues, effectively ending their freedom and risking their futures. Although GBV occurs in every country across all economic and social groups, negatively affecting both girls and boys, sadly, girls are particularly vulnerable. These types of violent acts against children are specifically committed against their will and are based on gender norms and an imbalance of power in their relationships.

In recent years, Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria has witness an increasing trend in the incidence of GBV which in turn causes public disorder. Approximately 59 percent of women in the state have experienced sexual and domestic violence, indicating a high prevalence of GBV (FEYRep. 2023). 80 cases of gender based violence was recorded in 2019, and 18 culprits prosecuted (Vanguard, Nov. 2022). Between January and November, 2023, Akwa Ibom State recorded 321 cases of gender based violence together with 120 rape cases. 170 out of the 321 cases were intimate

partner violence, most of which led to physical injury on the victims (Kristina Reports, 2023). The state has taken steps to address this issue, with the government securing convictions for more than fifteen offenders (Daily Post. Oct. 2019).

GBV is a serious issue in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Efforts are being made to address and prevent gender based violence in Akwa Ibom State, particularly in rural areas where traditional attitudes and norms cause public disorder. In response to the rising cases, the Akwa Ibom State government in 2020 approved the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law (VAPP). The implementation of the VAPP has been a critical step in combating GBV in the state. Additionally, the Akwa Ibom State Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) management committee reported 10 convictions in 2023, facilitated by the VAPP Law and the establishment of a response unit in the Ministry of Justice (Business Day, Jan. 2024)., yet the rate of GBV is still alarming. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in overcoming the limitations to the full implementation of the VAPP Act and ensuring effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders. The data indicates that GBV remains a pervasive issue that requires continuous attention and action from all sectors of society to protect the rights and well-being of individuals in Akwa Ibom State.

This paper is written to assess the implications of GBV on public disorder in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this paper is assess the implications of gender based violence on

public disorder in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Other specific objectives include:

- a. To highlight the efforts of the government in eliminating GBV and public disorder in Akwa Ibom State.
- b. To examine the challenges of GBV causing public disorder in Akwa Ibom State.
- c. To suggest useful solutions to the challenges of GBV causing public disorder in Akwa Ibom State.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is hoped that at the end of this research, its outcome will benefit scholars, analysts, researchers and the general public. First, the study will help readers in clear understanding of the concept of gender based violence, its challenges to public disorder as well as possible solutions to GBV practices generally.

This research will bring to fore, the efforts of Akwa Ibom State government in fighting to curb the menace of GBV causing public disorder.

Findings from the research will reveal the discrepancies that exist in scholars' views concerning the effects of GBV in Akwa Ibom State. It will equally add to existing literature on the subject matter for further research.

2.1 Literature Review

The section will review what other authors, informants, researchers and analysts wrote about the subject matter of this paper. This is structured along different subheadings.

2.1.1 The concept of gender-based violence

According to World Bank Group (2019), gender based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It refers to violence directed at individuals based on their gender and encompasses a range of abuses including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm, as well as harmful traditional practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) (World Bank Group, 2019).

GBV is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality, and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. It is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender based violence but the majority victims are women and girls (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019)

GBV is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world, undermining the health, dignity and autonomy of its victims (United Nations Population Fund, 2016).

To European Commission (2024), GBV is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.

To Umoh (2024), GBV includes violence against men, boys, women and girls or children living in the same domestic unit. Although women and girls are the main victims of GBV, it also causes severe harm to families and communities.

According to International Rescue

Committee (2023), GBV is an umbrella term for harmful acts of abuse perpetuated against a person's will and rooted in a system of unequal power between women and men. It is any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a person, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

2.1.2 The concept of public disorder

Public disorder can be seen as such substantial interference with the public peace as to constitute a significant threat to the health and safety of the people or a significant threat to public or private property. The term includes insurrection, rioting, looting, and persistent violent civil disobedience.

Public disorder misdemeanours are actions which unlawfully disturb the peace, work or normal way of life of citizens, create unrest, ill will, turmoil and interfere with citizens moving in the streets and other public places, or disrupt them in exercising their rights and duties, offend morality, disrupt the implementation of legal measures of public authorities and officials, threaten the general safety of persons and assets, offend public authorities or in some other way disrupt the public order and tranquillity, as well as the actions specified in the Act on Public Disorder Misdemeanours.

Most recorded misdemeanours include arguments, yelling, fights, insolence, excessive public, drunkenness, belittling or offending police officers, unsupervised keeping of animals, begging and loitering, giving alcohol to persons under

the influence of alcohol. An essential element of these misdemeanours is the fact that they are usually committed in the public, in the street, in shops, hospitality establishments and other public places.

Public disorder is a sign of democratic vitality and innovation for others. Depending on context, it takes many forms such as hooligans, gangs, rioters, and radical groups engage in violent rituals. A breakdown of order allows opportunistic action. Failed negotiations or broken organized social processes, themselves devoid of violence, may lead to coordinated destruction or scattered attacks (Umoh, 2024).

2.1.3 Causes of GBV and public disorder

There are many factors that increase the risk of GBV, with women and girls living through crises experiencing an increase in both the frequency and severity of GBV. This is because the same conditions that contribute to conflict and forced displacement also accelerate GBV. These include.

1. **Poverty:** Families who are pushed into poverty and other harmful practices like child marriages are on the increase. Young girls may be pulled out of education for marriage, to help with domestic tasks or to generate an income. Unemployment and economic distress in the household can cause GBV.
2. **Breakdown of services:** A collapse of community structure and the rule of law means everyone can find themselves without social support and protection systems in violent situations. It can also result in everyone traveling great distances in search of food, water or fuel, further increasing risk of sexual harassment and assault

3. **Conflict and war:** Rising numbers of conflicts globally are driving an increase in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Without the rule of law, GBV is often carried out with impunity. Armed forces may use rape as a weapon of war. Other forms of CRSV include sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence. A typical example is the alarming cases of kidnapping of girls by boko haram sect.
4. **Displacement:** Women living in refugee camps and other temporary accommodation can face safety issues that put them at greater risk. This can include having no locks on bathroom doors, joint male and female facilities, and inadequate lighting. Women living as refugees may have to find new livelihoods, which can lead to an increased risk of exploitation.
5. **Stress in the home:** Intimate partner violence is the most common form of GBV experience in humanitarian settings. Child maltreatment and abuse occur more frequently when families experience an inability to meet their basic needs, alcohol and substance abuse and inconsistent income (Umoh, 2024).

2.1.4 Government effort in eliminating GBV and public disorder in Akwa Ibom State

Several Laws are formulated and implemented by the Akwa Ibom State Government to curb the menace of GBV. Currently, GBV-related laws/policies in existence are Child Rights Law 2008, Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law 2020, Harmful Widowhood (Prohibition of Obnoxious Practices) Law 2013, and the Administration of Criminal Justice Law 2022. Of all the

laws, the VAPP Law have direct effect on GBV incidences more than any other laws in the state.

The Akwa Ibom State Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law, a transformative legislation was passed on 10th June 2019 and assented to on 19th June, 2020 by Governor Udom Emmanuel. The Law contains 6 Parts as follows: Part 1 (offences), Part 2 (Jurisdiction of the court), part 3 (Service Providers), Part 4 (Regulatory body), Part 5 (Consequential amendment) and Part 6 (Interpretation).

However, incidences of GBV contained in Part 1 of the VAPP Law, cover areas such as rape; inflicting physical injury on a person; coercion; wilfully placing a person in fear of physical injury; offensive conduct; prohibition of female circumcision or genital mutilation; frustrating investigation; wilfully making false statement; forceful ejection from home; depriving a person of his or her liberty; damage to property with intent to cause distress; forced financial dependence or economic abuse; forced isolation or separation from family and friends; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; harmful widowhood practice; abandonment of children, spouse and other dependents without means of sustenance; stalking; intimidation; spousal battery; harmful traditional practices; attack with harmful substance; administering a substance with intent; political violence; violence by state actors; incest; indecent exposure (VAPP Law, 2022).

The VAPP Law has aided the state in responding to GBV. A Survey by the Women Index (GBV) Ranking (2023)

revealed that 40.9% of citizens perceive customary/religious laws as effective in preventing and responding to GBV in the state. Nonetheless, the customary laws within the state, which are strictly informal, that perpetuate GBV have been outlawed, giving precedence to the formal laws.

The reporting system in the state is carried out at the GBV – designate desk in Police Commands/Divisions, while enforcement is done by the police, the Directorate of Public Prosecution at the Police Headquarters prosecutes. There are Family Support Units at the Nigerian Police Commands/Divisions, but no exclusive GBV Judges in the state. Legal aid/pro bono services are provided by the Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) Response Department especially for indigent victims, there are Gender based Violence Management Committee (GBVMC) unit across the 31 Local Government Secretariats of the state. The informal justice system comprises the village council, traditional rulers, and religious bodies. It has not been effective as on most occasions, men usual have their ways even when they are the perpetrators of the crime. These cultural norms tend to perpetuate GBV.

The State Government has prioritized the GBV interventions and campaigns with the allocation to and release of funding of GBV prevention and response. It possesses three equipped Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and an active shelter known as ‘The State GBV Centre’, which is a 60 bed facility accommodation. Some of the SARCs are situated at the hospitals which could serve as medical units for supporting GBV survivors in the state, including

during prosecution of perpetrators. The shelter is a functional skill acquisition centre, with accommodation for the victims and it is serving its purpose.

GBV awareness and sensitization programs are held on weekly basis across several radio and television stations in the state, including the Akwa Ibom State Broadcasting Corporation, community town halls, schools, churches, markets, parks and special days marked globally. There are persons with Disabilities-Accessible Information, Education and Communication (PwD-IEC) materials and sign interpreters in every event organized by the GBVMC, also television programs are subtitled for PwDs, but there are no specific events targeted at PwDs.

The state approved N4.301 billion, N4.158 billions, N3.83 billion, and N1.60 billion for spending by the Ministry of Women Affairs and social welfare in 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021 and 2020, respectively. These allocations to the Ministry are to curb the menaces of GBV (Women Index (GBV) Ranking, 2023; Umoh, 2024).

2.1.5 Implementation of the VAPP Law to eliminate GBV and public disorder: Few notable cases

Rape case by Akaninyene Sunday Ekwere:

Akaninyene Sunday Ekwere, a trader in engine oil, electrical appliances and recharge cards, reportedly lured a four year old girl to his shop in Ikot Ibritam, Oruk Anam Local Government Area, where he defiled her. The mother of the victim discovered bruises around her private part when she bathed her,

prompting her parents to report the matter to the Police.

The presiding judge, Justice Nkereuwem Obot of the Akwa Ibom State High Court sitting in Oruk Anam Local Government Area of the state sentenced him to life imprisonment for the rape. This was facilitated by the VAPP Law because the offence of rape carries life imprisonment, in addition to the name of the victim being entered into the registrar of sex offenders in the state (Odey, 2024).

Rape case by Uduak Moses Idimudo:

Idimudo, a native of Efoi in Eket Local Government Area was sentenced on 19th August, 2023 by Justice Efiong Efiong who found him guilty of 19 out of the 20 counts of rape, to life imprisonment for raping two girls, aged 14 and 15, both Junior Secondary School (JSS) students in Eket.

One of the victims told the court that she and her 14 year old friend were hawking fried cow hides, popularly known as *pomo* in the country, on the road in Efoi in July, 2020 when the convict bought the hides worth N700 and asked them to accompany him to his room to get the money or make a detour to his house on their way home from selling their wares.

She said on their way home, they went back to the convict's house as he directed to get back their money, but he insisted that they must follow him inside his room, which they obliged. The first prosecution witness said the convict pushed her and her friend on his bed and forcefully removed their pants and inserted his penis inside their vagina and took turn to rape them and after gave them N350 instead of the N700 he owed

them.

The JSS 3 student also narrated how the convict told her and friend to come back to his house for the money but warned not to tell their parents or anyone else about the rape, else he will kill them. She told the court that they went home without telling their parents and one month after, in August, 2020, they went back to the convict's house for the balance of their money and the convict again adopted the same method and took turns to rape them again. He however did not pay the debt, asking them to come back again.

The minors said the convict adopted the same procedure of raping them from July 2020 to April 2021 until one woman, a neighbour of the convict, who noticed the children coming on monthly to the house of the convict, reported to their parents (Ekponta, 2023).

Rape case by Uduak Frank Akpan:

Justice Bassey Nkenang, found Uduak Akpan guilty of rape and murder of Miss Iniubong Umoren, a job seeker and a graduate of philosophy from the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. In his judgment, the judge slammed him with life imprisonment for having carnal knowledge of the deceased and also sentenced him to death by hanging for actually strangulating her.

Umoren lured Iniobong with job placement and eventually raped and killed her. While being paraded by the police, the convict confessed that he used what he called 'reverse psychology' to lure the victim to his family residence at Nung Ikono Obio Village in the Uruan Local Government Area for a job interview in April 2021 where she met

her untimely death. He had used similar tactics in the past rape of six other women and got away with it (Emmanuel, 2022).

Rape case by Idorenyin Umoh:

Justice Charles Ikpe in Akwa Ibom State High Court, Ikot Ekpene on November, 2023, sentenced Idorenyin Umoh, a native of Utu Ikpe Village in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State to 16 years in prison after he was found guilty of both offences of rape and assault of a 17 year old girl in Utu Ikpe Village. The particulars of the case revealed that it was not the first time that the convict raped the victim, the reason she was always scared whenever she saw him.

The latest incident occurred when Umoh was said to have accosted the girl who was accompanied by her friend to pick some mango fruits behind their family compound at Utu Ikpe, and he threatened them and her friend ran away. The victim ran into a bush and the convict chased her and at a close range, hit her head with a stone, overpowered her and raped her in the bush (Onuegbu, 2023).

Spousal battery by Ekere Sunday Ebong:

The Akwa Ibom State Police Command on December, 2023 arrested a lawyer, Ekere Sunday Ebong accused of assaulting his wife, identified as Kufre, following a viral video where he was seen assaulting his wife and causing her bodily injury. In the video, which showed that the incident happened in the night, the suspect was seen assaulting his wife who was half dressed. The suspect repeatedly hit his wife while demanding for keys, despite appeals from neighbours who cautioned him. One of the neighbours, who was heard asking the man why he

beat the wife every night, asked the woman to stay in his house.

The Police Public Relations Officer in the state, SP Odiko Macdon, said in a press released noted, "In a video that went viral, the suspect assaulted his wife, dehumanized her, leading to various grievous injuries. He is a known habitual perpetrator of violent acts against his wife over the years. As an agency saddled with the protection of lives and property and maintenance of law and order, we cannot allow Barrister Ebong to continue this flagrant abuse of human rights. Hence, the Commissioner of Police, CP Olatoye Durosinmi, ordered the arrest of the suspect to prevent murder and breakdown of law and order" (Umo, 2023).

2.1.6 GBV Statistics in Akwa Ibom State

Wife of Akwa Ibom State Governor, Patience Eno, the Deputy Governor, Dr. Akon Eyakenyi and members of the State Gender Based Violence Management Committee, during the official flag-off of activities to commemorate 16 days of activism against gender based violence, revealed that Akwa Ibom State recorded about 321 cases of gender based violence including 120 rape cases within the last 11 months which is between January and November 2023. 10 out of the 120 rape cases were reported every month (Imukudo, 2023). However, 18 cases were reported in May while the least, five cases were reported in September, 2023. 170 of the 321 cases were that of spousal battery, a lot of which resulted in physical injury on the victims with the highest number, 39 cases, being recorded in April and the least number, 30 cases, was recorded in January, June and August (Joseph, 2023).

In June 17, 2024, Barrister Emem Ette, the Secretary, Gender based Violence Management Committee in the State, held that the Committee empowered by the VAPP Law, through the Sexual and Gender Based Violence Response Department in the Ministry of Justice has attended to a total of 1,467 cases of SGBV from 2021 when it was established till date.

From the number, rape is 401; attempted rape is 118; harmful widowhood practice is 53; abandonment of dependants 65 (meaning people who abandon either children or spouses); forceful ejection from home 32; intimidation 54; stalking 21; incest 35; spousal battery 520; physical abuse is 165; cases that are going through investigations right now are over 210; cold cases 120. Cold cases arise for example where someone is gang raped and cannot recognize or identify the perpetrators, or the perpetrator cannot be found or witnesses cannot be found. Other cases are the ones where men rape men, women rape women.

Out of all the cases mentioned, there are 53 convictions; cases that have been withdrawn are 302; cases settled through alternative dispute resolution are 240; while pending cases are over 425. About 350 survivors have been rehabilitated and given shelter and skill acquisition training in the state's GBV shelter (Anthony, 2024).

From the available statistics, spousal battery records the highest. It is believe that not every case of GBV that occurs in the State is being reported and as such the number is a lot more than what is currently being reported.

2.1.7 The effects of GBV causing public disorder in Akwa Ibom State

GBV poses great challenges which in turn, cause public disorder. Some of the challenges are seen as follows:

1. Violation of human rights: It is an unrelenting assault on human dignity, depriving people of their human rights. Freedom from violence is a fundamental human right, and GBV undermines a person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. It affects not only physical health but also mental health and may lead to self-harm, isolation, depression and suicidal attempts.
2. Threats to a person's physical and psychological integrity: Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure, and where this is not present, people's ability to function in the family, community and society likely to be impaired, as self-realization and development are affected, GBV is an obstacle to the realization of every person's well-being and to their right to fulfilment and self-development.
3. Discriminatory nature: GBV is deeply rooted in harmful stereotypes and prejudices against women or other people who do not fit into a traditional gender binary or hetero-normative society. The severity of the punishment for men who do not act according to expectations concerning male gender roles (whether gay, bisexual or heterosexual) may be related to the perceived danger that their difference presents to normalized and dominant assumptions about gender. Their very lives might collide and appear to contradict the idea that there are natural forms of behaviour and social roles in general for men and women.
4. GBV obstruct gender equality: Gender equality on the other hand, entails equal

rights for people of all genders, as well as equal visibility, and equal opportunities for empowerment, taking responsibility and participating in all spheres of public and private life. GBV contributes to cultivating a hetero-normative society and perpetuates the power of men.

5. GBV is under-reported and there is often impunity for perpetrators: Common myths, such that what happens at home should stay at home or that it is nobody's business what happens in the family are very powerful. This makes denouncing violence in the family difficult, and it may affect the provision of help and support services, thereby exposing the abused person to greater harm, with possibly fatal consequences. Furthermore, violence very often silences those who are affected by it. By failing to speak out against domestic violence we also mirror the techniques used by perpetrators.
6. GBV affects everyone: Children raised in families where a woman is abuse are also victims of violence (sometimes not physically, but always psychologically). The children witness violence and may form the impression that such behaviour is justified or normal. In other words, they assimilate violent norms. They are also brought up in a culture of violence that may negatively affect their self-development and ability to function in society. Gender-based violence affects family members, friends and colleagues.
7. GBV has a very heavy economic cost: It requires the involvement of different services – medical, psychological, the police or justice system and it results in the loss of resources or of employment by victims. It makes people underachieve at work and in education, and it negatively affects their

productivity (Umoh, 2024).

2.1.8 The challenges in handling of GBV cases in Akwa Ibom State

Some challenges have been identified:

1. Lack of expertise in handling GBV cases by law enforcement agents, village heads and other responders. How they can ask questions and not re-traumatize victims. Due to lack of expertise, some victims withdraw their cases while some abandoned it.
2. Unwillingness of victims to follow through cases as a result of unavailability of a witness protection scheme, threats or inducements by the perpetrators. This can delay the case.
3. Bribery of the victims by the suspects. Some victims, if the suspect offers them money or the family, they will withdraw and even relocate out of jurisdiction.
4. Long delays and perpetual adjournment of cases in our judicial system. Also, the state does not have enough judges. Delays in justice delivery create apathy and make the victims lose interest, especially when it has to do with those victims paying their way to court.
5. Another challenge is fear of stigmatization. Shame and stigma will make some families not to pursue a case because they feel that their child will be known as someone that has been raped.
6. Lack of funding of law enforcement agencies also impedes arrest, which sometimes makes the victims bear the cost of arrest. This may make them lose interest in following up cases. The officers need response vehicles so that when they are called upon even at 1:00am or 3:00am, they can respond immediately without any delay.
7. Village and family heads excessive interventions. There are cases where a village head prevent the police from

entering into the community to arrest anyone because of rape rather opted to settled internally (Anthony, 2024).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research work adopts the Theory of Patriarch and Power Dynamics. Notable proponents of the Theory of Patriarch include Simone de Beauvoir, who explored gender inequality in her ground breaking working “The Second Sex – 1949”, and Kate Millett, who discussed patriarchy’s impact on women’s lives in “Sexual Politics – 1970” (Simply Psychology, 2024). The theory of Patriarchy posits that societal structures and norms are inherently patriarchal, granting men more power and control over women. This power imbalance perpetuates gender based violence.

In the context of Akwa Ibom State, this theory sheds light on the root causes and dynamics of GBV, the key elements in this theory are:

- a. Gender roles and expectations: Traditional gender roles in Akwa Ibom State often assign men as breadwinners and women as caregivers. These roles reinforce power imbalances. Expectations around masculinity emphasize dominance, aggression and control, while femininity is associated with submission and passivity.
- b. Norms and Socialization: Socialization processes reinforce these gender norms from an early age. Children learn what is considered “appropriate” behaviour for their gender. Boys are taught to be assertive, while girls are encouraged to be nurturing and accommodating.
- c. Economic Independence: Economic disparities contribute to GBV. Women’s financial dependence on men can trap them in abusive relationships. Lack of

economic autonomy limits women’s ability to leave violent situations.

- d. Legal and institutional factors: Weak legal frameworks and inadequate enforcement hinder justice for survivors. Cultural practices, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation, perpetuate violence.
- e. Social stigma and silence: Victims often face stigma and blame, discouraging them from reporting abuse. Silence perpetuates violence by allowing perpetrators to act with impunity.

3.1 Research Methods

This research was conducted using the descriptive design, which focuses on the description of the major elements and characteristics of any phenomenon or attribute. Data for this research was obtained basically from secondary sources, which include textbooks, journals, internet materials and published materials.

4.1 Findings

The following findings have been drawn from the research:

1. Although the efforts of the government in combating GBV in the state are commendable, key stakeholders such as the police especially, including traditional rulers, youth and women leaders, religious leaders, community health workers, and NGOs that would have aided in GBV prevention are not adequately equipped. This continues to hinder the progress of GBV cases prevention.
2. Problems such as lack of expertise in handling GBV cases, unwillingness of victims to follow through cases, bribery of the victims by the suspects, long delays and perpetual adjournment of

cases in our judicial system, fear of stigmatization, lack of funding of law enforcement agencies, as well as village and family heads excessive interventions, continue to hinder the smooth war against GBV in the state.

3. Although the implementation of the VAPP Law has been a critical solution and step in combating GBV, the Law is still not comprehensive to cover some critical areas like ensuring effective protection and remedies for victims and punishment of offenders. There is still lack of free protective and legal aid for GBV survivors. This makes it difficult for the survivors of GBV to have adequate access to support services.
4. Many citizens, especially those at the rural areas still lack knowledge of the existence of laws on GBV related issues. This is due to lack of regular and adequate sensitization about GBV to give hope to survivors.

5.1 Conclusion

Akwa Ibom State has over the years, experience an unpleasant trend of GBV which has unfortunately not only cause public disorder, but has become a threat not just to women but the society at large. In the light of this, a global collaboration is a critical requirement in creating a safe, healthy and conducive environment for all genders. To this end, twisted traditional practices or beliefs that encourage gender based violence need to be overhauled by creating a purpose driven framework. Perpetrators of GBV should be severely punished.

Several factors have precipitated the rise in GBV some of which include lack of value for the human life, the desensitization of the grievousness of gender based violence, ignorance,

illiteracy, anti-humane cultural values, lack of adequate commitment by law enforcement agents in curbing the growing trend of gender based violence.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. For the efforts of the government in combating GBV in the state to be sustained, key stakeholders such as the police especially, including traditional rulers, youth and women leaders, religious leaders, community health workers, men and boys, community health workers, faith-based groups and NGOs that are playing significant roles in GBV prevention should be adequately equipped. There can be regular group discussions and community dialogues on how to prevent GBV. This will provide diverse strategies in GBV prevention.
2. Since it is observed that the problems hindering the smooth war against GBV are lack of expertise in handling GBV cases, unwillingness of victims to follow through cases, bribery of the victims by the suspects, long delays and perpetual adjournment of cases in our judicial system, fear of stigmatization, lack of funding of law enforcement agencies, as well as village and family heads excessive interventions, a special commission with proper legal backing should be establish to monitor and facilitate the processes that prevent GBV in the state.
3. Government should strengthen the VAPP Law and other legal framework to ensure that laws against GBV are comprehensive, enforceable, and in line with international human rights standards. This includes revising and publishing manuals on sexual and gender-based violence to guide

communities on the prevention and response mechanisms. There should be proper provision of accessible and adequate support services for survivors, including healthcare, legal aid, and counselling. The government should organize training for police and judiciary officers on how to respond to, protect and refer victims and survivors for appropriate services.

4. Regular and adequate sensitization as well as awareness about GBV and its consequences should be done always to help change attitudes and behaviours. The government and NGOs should direct educational programs toward both genders and all age groups to foster a culture of respect and equality. Also, empowering young girls and women economically can reduce their vulnerability to GBV. Initiatives that provide women with economic opportunities and independence should be effectively established by the government and NGO.

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