# A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOME SELECTED CONFLICT AREAS

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## Introduction

Over the years, sexual violence has taken the centre stage in most conflict zones in the various regions of the world and forms part of the academic discuss in several fori. In Africa, the Middle East and even in Europe and America, the female gender has gone through several gory experiences ranging from rape, dislocation and other social vices with severe impact on the female gender over the centuries. Women and children in conflict zones scamper for safety as they are left at the mercy of the warlords who, in most cases, treat them as objects to be used and discarded at the whim and caprices of those who wielded the gun. This research therefore, focuses on broader issues of violence against women because they suffer great hardships in times of conflict and the women and girls in conflicts zones of Nigeria and elsewhere in the world are no exception. For instance, during the conflicts with the oil companies and the Nigerian government, women were subjected to all manners of sexual violence.

During conflicts, thousands of females are usually subjected to rape conducted as both individual sexual assaults and as collective rapes. Rape is considered to be one of the most traumatic peacetime human experiences (Arcel, 1992). It is also associated with some of the highest rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Breslau, 1991; Rosic, 2001) resulting into many cases that appear to resist spontaneous healing over time (Foa, 1989). This is the reason why sexual violence is seen as a profound and public health problem in all countries. Women who experience sexual violence not only suffer severe physical injuries but may also distinguish themselves from others and replay the assault in their minds and are at risk of revitalisation (Shulz, 2006). Women with a history of sexual assaults are more likely to attempt or commit suicide (Feliti, 1998). This position appears to be an overgeneralization because there is actually no clear indication of such among women who suffered such assault in most conflict regions. However such tendency may happen in some cases owing to the psychological trauma that goes with in some societies.

Sexual violence has been reported as a significant feature of several active conflicts in Africa, including the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In this area, Sexual violence has been carried out not only by domestic armed troops but also by the government security forces (Amir, 1998). As already mentioned above, during the conflict, civilians in the Niger Delta, particularly women and girls, were vulnerable to sexual violence. This included rape, mutilation, and sexual slavery. Some of these abuses appear to be opportunistic or the production of a larger breakdown in law and social order that may occur amidst conflict. Sexual violence has also been employed by combatant groups as a tool of war, designed to wreck damage on the entire community. That was why Moore (2003) described Sexual violence as the "Collateral damage" of fighting, or a product of an increase in internal conflicts carried out in whole or in part by an

irregular force. This has severe impact on women and girls as could be seen from different perspectives with its attendant's impact on the lives of the victims. Scholars opines that or were of the view thatexual abuse survivors experienced few psychological effects (Kendall,Williams and Finkelhor, 2003). This position may not be accepted in its totality since it deals with the individual psyche of the victim. One explanation is that severe distress may be greater when sexual trauma occurs in the presence of adverse family characteristics, such as parental alcoholic problems. (Ferguson, Horwood and Lynskey 1996). Another explanation is that psychological consequences of sexual trauma may be exacerbated among individuals that experience subsequent sexual victimizations, thereby contributing to worse symptoms in adulthood (Coid, 2003). These controversies highlight the need for vigorous study of the impact of sexual violence among the female gender. This is with the view to assess its impact and the individuality in it, since victims are not likely to develop or face the same trauma in all of the conflict zones in the same way..

## Theoretical Framework

This work looks at two basic theories, one has to do with the development of human personality as espoused by Sigmud Freud where the three stages of the development of human personality is espoused "the id, ego and the super ego". While the second theory has to do with the gender relation of power espoused by Johan Geltung. Johan look at the relation of power where one person has the ability to impose his will and supposed authority on the other. In a clear term he looks at violence as connection between someone who has the power to bring the other (object) to submission. In an explanation Freud gave an analysis of the development of human mind (personality).According to Freud (1925), it was from the soul, what he called human mind that the complementary drives of differentiation and integration arose. He described his construct of the id, ego and the super ego. The id is the most primitive part of our personality. It operates according to the pleasure theory and it simply seeks immediate gratification. Freud believed that every human had a life and death construct. The life instinct is called Eros while the death instinct is called Thanatos. Both are integral part of the id and the energy for this mechanism is libido, a flowing, dynamic force.

The ego is different from the id as it is extremely objective. It operate according to the "reality theory" and deals with the demands of the environment. It regulates the flow of libido and keeps the id in check, this acting as a "control centre" of the personality. It is the superego which represents the values and standards of an individual personality. It acts as an internal judge, it punishes the ego with feeling of guilt or it rewards, which lead to feeling of pride and heightened self-esteem. The superego is a characteristic of the personality which strives for protection. According to Freud, the disparity and development of the id, ego and the superego, determines an individual's behaviour in a

given situation, which in turn results in the development of the personality. Freud placed great importance on the early years of a child as he believed that what we are as adult is determined by the childhood experiences. These years proceed through a number of stages. These are the oral stage (first year of life), anal stage (second year of life), the phallic stage (3rd through 5th year of life), a period of latency (from 6 to 12), and the genital stage (after puberty). Freud believed that as every child passed through these stages there might be a likely possibility that a child may spend more time in a particular stage than they ought to do. This condition can lead to a fixation or an incomplete development of the personality.

AcCoiding to Freud, perpetrators of sexual violence are at the level of id, which is the primitive part of the soul of man that seeks only raw desires. This, for him is the reason why no amount of noise, yelling and appeal from their women victims can break away their sexual feelings. Freud believed that every perpetrator of Sexual Violence has the primitive desire to be a "real man", and to be a real man is to be violent and not to show emotions.

**The second theory is Theory of Gender relations of power**

This theory provides an explanation to the concept of violence. According to Johan Galtung violence means power to bring (Windu, 1999). He understood violence to be a connection between someone who has power (subject) to bring other parts (objects). In relation with its terminology, violence significantly correlates with power. Violence against women is understood as the cases which happened because of the inequality of power between men and women.

Patriarchy as an ideology which is based on "male norms" is a source of gender bias (Basin, 1996). This behaviour according to Galtung, placed women in a subordinative and marginal position which is possible to be controlled by men. This control appears in social and in conflict times. Galtung differentiated violence against women in two kinds, namely: sexual violence and non-sexual violence. Sexual violence consists of sexual desires of the actor and unwelcomed by the victims (Rubentoin, 2000). This kind of violence can appear in many formats, both as verbal and non-verbal which include threat, intimidation, torture and murder (Brison, 2000).

Violence against women can also appear in many other formats such as sexual harassment, rape with torture, rape with murder and women forced as commercial sex worker.

Galtung held his view that women are often seen as objects rather than subjects in their own homes and communities, as this is reflected in norms of behaviour, code of conducts, and laws that perpetuate their status and lower beings as second-class citizens. In daily life, gender relations of power often underpin equal access to and control over material and non-material resources and unfair divisions of possibilities of improving one's life.

Galtung put forth that if war and militarization could be eliminated, rape,

social problems could be resolved and progress towards equality, social fairness, women violation and prosperity could be made (Galtung, 1994). The two theories clearly define the position, causes and consequences women and girls suffered in an event of rape. The discussion of this work is situated or anchored on these theories as it provides ample explanations why women and girls suffer in an event of rape. Women are also naturally weak this explains why they could not sustain any serious resistance when exposed to such ugly circumstance.

**In Defence of Women**

Ward, Horwood, McEvoy, Shipman and Rumble (2007) carried out research on human rights violation. They concluded that women are still caught up in a cycle of human rights violation since the first United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico, 1975. They reported that a woman born anywhere in the world has a one in three chance of being raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

Mazurana, Raven-Roberts and Parpart (2005) and Ertarth (2007), in their investigation, said that the absence of a functioning criminal justice system perpetuates a culture of impunity associated with this abuse. The end of armed conflict does not signal the end of violence against women, for example Sierra Leone and Congo (International Rescue Committee (IRC), 2007). This position is generally not the case, because in almost all the sovereign nations who are also members of the world body (United Nations) all have the necessary justice apparatus to deal with the case of violence against women. What appears to be the challenge generally is the ability and the political will to put the judicial apparatus to work as it should, to protect women and girls. In similar direction women are left to the mercy of militia men in almost all the conflict zones of the world. They are captured and abducted and sexually assaulted without any serious move to save them from the hands of their abductors.

Many were put in family ways by their abductors without regard to any sense of humanity and government has little or nothing to do to save them from the hands of their abductors. Such ugly incidence happens in Nigeria and Liberia. Also Mariner, (2004) investigated the influence of gun in the sexual violation of women and concluded that in Dafur, Sudan the United Nations has since accused the Janjawee – Arab militiamen of abducting and gang-raping thousands of women and girls using sophisticated weapons.Herman, (1992) examined the effect of rape in conflict situation, using Sudan as a case study. He said that it is widely accepted that rape causes severe physical and psychological pain and suffering. Going further, he concluded that, it is undisputed that rape can have serious physical, psychological and reproductive consequences for the victims, including death, unwanted pregnancies, complications in child birth, and sexually transmitted infections.

Testimonies gathered by Amnesty International (2004 lead to one uncompromising conclusion: that women and girls in Nigeria continue to be

discriminated against in law and practice. This is due to several factors. The social stigma attached to being a victim of rape discourages women from reporting the crime and very few cases of rape are brought to court. The victim dwells in psychological pains. The Nigerian government compounds these acts of torture by failing to exercise due diligence in bringing perpetrators to justice and by failing to offer women any form of redress or reparation (Lydia, 2008).

Ogunyomi (2007), writing on the typologies of discriminative practices in the Nigerian work places, identified sex discrimination as being prevalent in Nigeria. This, he said, takes the form of a women being treated less favourably than a man on the grounds of sex, or indirectly by conditions applied equally to men and women which are detrimental to women.

Reilly (2003) gave a very good account of the form of violence women passed through. He reported that, protocol guarantees women freedom from violence. But in reality, there is a prevalence of violence against women in our society. Violence takes several forms, including domestic violence like early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, widow torture and inheritance-related violence. There are also direct forms of violence against women in Nigeria.

In discussing the impact of the activities of militants, cults and security forces on women in the Niger Delta, Okon (2000) stated: "… when a culture of armed gang violence takes root in a society that does not recognize and respect women's rights, the result is a higher level of gender-based violence against women. In this case the proliferation of guns in the Niger Delta has increased the risk that girls and women will be the targets of sexual assaults. In another section of the same work, she stated that, 'the consequence has been disastrous, as women have suffered massive massacre, rape, sexual abuse, social psychological trauma … aggravated poverty, unemployment, anger, bitterness, frustration, fear, tension and more conflicts.'

Ngozi (2008), in a research carried out on violence against women, revealed that some violence was performed by law enforcement agents. This can be direct or indirect. Direct assault by security officers is becoming prevalent. There was a case of a policeman who raped two girls in Gwagwalada High court, in Abuja. In Odioma community in the Niger Delta, Amnesty International reported a case where a raped victim described how she was raped alongside her mother by security officers. She was carrying a pregnancy at that time. She later lost the baby (Amnesty International, 2002). Nicole, Yuan, Koss and Mirto (2010)'s research carried out on the Psychological consequences of sexual trauma showed clearly that the rate of violence against girls and women remain high. The National Violence against Women Survey found that 18% of women reported experienced a completed or attempted rape during their lifetime (Jjaden and Thoennes, 2000). More than half (54%) of the rape survivors that responded to the survey were younger than

age 18 when they experienced their first attempted or completed rape. On-going research attention to mental health outcomes is also driven by evidence that survivors' responses are largely complex and unique to each individual (Briere and Jordan, 2004) some individuals experienced severe symptoms or long-term distress, whereas others did not (Finkelhor, 2001).

Coid, (2003) came out with a research finding on the effects of childhood and adulthood sexual victimization on women's mental health. Existing data on understudied communities and risk factors for mental health problems are also presented. Childhood and adulthood sexual violence are discussed separately because, contrary to public opinion, sexual violence against children is fairly common and is frequently associated with psychological distress that continues into adulthood. There is also evidence that the mental health effects of childhood sexual victimization might be different from those done to the adulthood.

**Rape and Other Experiences of Women in Conflict Zones**

The violence that women face during crises does not exist in vacuum but rather a direct result and a reflection of the violence, discrimination and marginalization that women face in times of relative peace (Hobdell, 1993). In view of this, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, in October 2010, called on all member state and the United Nations (UN) system to protect the rights of women in the context of armed conflict and to ensure women's full participation in all conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

This encouraged the view of some scholars who have challenged the notion that rape and other forms of sexual assault and abuse are inevitable parts of conflict, and that the need of conflict-related sexual violence survivors is not a priority. This is supportive of the findings of Kelly (2001) which says that there has to be growth in the number and scale of programmes to address the needs of female sexual violence survivors in humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as the efforts aimed at preventing sexual violence.

In Bosnia, Herzegovina and Rwanda, rape was an essential part of ethnic cleansing. Women were raped often in the presence of their spouses, parents, or other family members to humiliate and terrorize members of a particular ethnic group (Finkelhor, 2001) In Angola and Mozambique, rebels kidnapped young women. Throughout Africa, belligerents often used HIV/AIDS as a tool of warfare (Finkelhor, 2001). Abject poverty, migration of populations and social disorganization caused by conflicts contributed to the growth of prostitution in many post-conflict societies.

Few relevant studies to which this researcher had access include those of Guwa (1999). The findings supported the revelation of women and the pains they experienced during conflict. Guwa (1999) reported that conflicts profoundly affect the family and often increased the household burdens of

women. They lead to the growth of households headed by simple women as men are killed, disabled, imprisoned or off fighting. Guwa (1999) reported that the burden of raising orphans and abandoned children often fell on the extended families or even neighbours, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. Women typically assume greater economic responsibilities in the face of growing poverty and hardships during and after conflicts.

Conflicts contribute to a marked increase in poverty. The consequences of poverty are invariably worse for women in all case study countries as cultural, social, and economic factors work to their disadvantage. There are proportionately larger reductions in nutrient intake for women than for men. In addition, the health and education needs of girls receive less priority than those of boys in times of economic adversity. To support these findings, Koegel (2000) discovered that conflict did not only undermine the traditional social order but also facilitate increased participation of women in public affairs. Koegel observed that the victims of war are civilians; that male and female civilians in particular women are subjected to torture, and war rape is more frequently perpetrated on women than men. Supporting this, Finkelhor (2001) investigated the cause and found out that the long standing power imbalance between men and women in society continues to be a central factor.

Dawn (2004) linked the mistreatment and abuse during conflict to the social and economic reality of women's lives to the webs of discriminatory attitudes, values, behaviours, structures and institutions that undermine, isolate and marginalize women. This made Hock (2009) to report that the effect of poverty, unemployment and isolation further increase women's vulnerability during conflict. This finding further revealed that any woman, regardless of her circumstances, may experience abuse. But statistics has shown that conflict situations increase, either directly or indirectly, women's vulnerability to being abused in their relationship.

Sexual violence in warfare is frequently perpetrated against women and the perpetrators of sexual assault commonly include not only enemy civilians and troops but also allied civilians and even comrades in arms. Even when laws of war have reorganised and forbidden sexual assaults, only few prosecutors have been brought to book. This made Kamunzu (2009) to note that laws and custom of war prohibit offences such as inhuman treatment or indecent assaults. That gender violence, particularly sexual violation and rape against women in conflict situations have been employed and still being used today as weapons of war at an alarming rate and intolerable to human dignity and rights. Worldwide, there are unified efforts to make this issue visible, so that the perpetrators do not go unpunished.

As sexual violence affects all parts of the society, the responsibility to curb sexual violence is imminent. The responsibility can be categorized as individual approaches, health care responsibility, community-based

effort and actions to prevent other forms of sexual violence. Australian women safety surveys conducted by the Bureau of Statistics in 1999 involved a random sampling of 6,300 women aged 18 and above. In Cambodia, rape was estimated by local and international NGOs to be common. In Canada, the most frequently cited research was conducted by researchers in 1992; this involved a random sampling of 12,300 women.

Researchers found out in these countries that over one in three women had experienced a sexual violation and that only six percent of sexual assaults were reported to the police. In Eastern Congo, the prevalence and intensity of rape and other sexual violence during conflict were described as the worst in the world. It was estimated that there were as many as 200,000 surviving rape victims living in DRC, Congo today. A new study showed more than 400,000 women were raped in DRC. South Africa has the highest incidence of baby rape in the world, with more than 67,000 cases of rape and sexual assault against children by the warring groups reported in 2000.

As the world changes and new forms of armed-conflict and human rights abuses emerge, international law is often lagged behind. Therefore, it is common for international policies to be adopted to fill the gaps. While international laws and policies and international institutions that make and enforce them, seemed to be far removed from everyday lives of most women, they can be very effective tools for changing community attitudes, applying pressure on politicians and others who hold positions of power. Female rape is a taboo subject; it happens but it is concealed by the victims who are too ashamed to speak out especially in a society that is not prepared to listen (Mezey and King, 2000).

Overtime, the topic of sexual violence against women has become a taboo in society, as the homophobic visions of Judaism, Christianity and the Islam became institutionalised (Arcel, 2000). Nonetheless, sexual violence against women in conflict setting still exists. And the culture of impunity in war-torn societies fosters the use of these brutal tactics to achieve military and political goals.

Sexual violence against women has become a prominent issue in political, humanitarian, legal and academic spheres in the past two decades. Sexualised violence against women and girls is still surrounded by a wall of silence. Breaking down this wall and treating the issue of sexual violence against women during conflict is important to help these hidden victims of war, and to punish the perpetrators.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) stated on its website that ‘Gender-based Violence, or Violence Against Women (VAM), is a major public health and human rights problems. (World Health Organisation, 2011). However, this is not how these terms shall be used in this research. Lewis, (2009) described sexual violence as any violence, whether physical or mental, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality. Mendy (2002)

revealed that a change of mindset is necessary to bring sexual violence against women in armed conflict to the forefront of political, humanitarian, legal and scholarly discussions to give support and justice to the victims.

Women, according to Sivakumaran (2007), experienced different forms of sexual violence during conflict. There is the concept of "rape plus", the plus signifying infection with HIV/AIDs. This has been documented in Kusovo. Enforced sterilisation is another type of sexual violence. This has been extensively documented in the war in former Yugoslavia, where eyewitnesses and victims have reported this form of violation. "I saw how women were forced to bite each other's vulva off, their mouth filled with blood" (Oral proceedings cited in Lewis, 2009).

Other kinds of sexual violence against women include sexual slavery as happened in Liberia (Johnson, 2008), and forced masturbation of the victims, which was documented in Sri Lanka (Peel, 2000). The infamous Abu Ghraib case in Iraq showed victims forced to undress, while being sexually threatened (Sivakumaran, 2007).

There are also numerous examples of genital violence like forced circumcision of clitoris and electroshock in such conflicts as in Croatia and in Northern Ireland (Wood, 2006).

Sexual violence, when targeted against women, may be used for personal gratification, military training or rewarding of soldiers (Wood, 2006). In most cases, however, it is a systematic weapon of war used to further political or military goals, which may include displacing populations, eliciting information or ethnic cleansing (Smith-Spark, 2004).

The dynamics underlying the use of sexual violence as a war tactic is twofold: they rely on structures of power and dominance and processes of emasculation of the individual and the group. Ruth Seifert, in her analysis of rape, made the important point that 'in the act of rape the perpetrator's sexuality is not an end in itself. Rather, it is used as an instrument in exerting violence' (Seifert, 1992). Indeed sexual violence is all about power and dominance over the victim. Female rape can be seen as a form of male-to-male communication, stressing how men fail to protect their women from harm, thereby dominating them (Seifert, 1992). The use of rape in conflict reflects the inequalities women face in their everyday lives. Until governments live up to their obligations to ensure equality and end discrimination against women, rape will continue to be a favourite weapon of the aggressor. Even the Niger Delta women are not left as women experience very high rates of sexual violence during conflict. Majority of these women suffer from discriminatory practices and are therefore, particularly affected by the consequences of armed conflict. Displaced women, women who are head of households especially in rural areas, youth and poor women are the most vulnerable groups. These women have lost their protection and are exposed to all manners of sexual intimidations and

exploitations. One of the main findings of this will be the increase invisibility of women during conflict and consequently the difficulty in targeting them and addressing their needs. This supports the findings of Ganzarian and Buchele (1988) who investigated that the women are often not able to voice their needs during the times of scarce resources because of the unfriendly situation conflict creates.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this work reveals clearly that sexual violence is one of the vices that has bedevilled very many parts of the world. It has in its entirety reveals that the actions of some group for selfish and personal aggrandizement has made sojourn in some areas of the human society a nightmare to the female gender. The inhumanity perpetuated by those who wielded the guns against the women folk deserves a concerted efforts by individuas, community, states and the world body to rise beyond condemnation academic discuss and rhetorics to a more concerted efforts aimed at rallying manpower and resources together to fight this menace to a stand still. It is apparent that finding an end to gender based or sexual violence is as important as finding a lasting peace in human society. Ending the cycle of impunity which currently exists for acts of sexual violence and sexual slavery during armed conflict will require also the political will as well as concerted action by the international community, and the United Nations, governmental and Non-governmental actors.

Developing the effectiveness and availability of the existing legal framework is a critical component of any such action. It is thus recommended, that the state should enact special legislation incorporating international criminal law into their municipal legal systems. Domestic law codifications of international law should specifically criminalize slavery and acts of sexual violence, including rape as grave breaches of the Geneva Convention, war crimes and torture constituting acts of crime against humanity. States should search for and bring to justice all perpetrators of grave breaches of this law possibly with a severe penalty that could serve as deterrent.

Research also shows that victims of sexual violence were abandoned in their pains and trauma, by the perpetrators, government and their family members with no one to care for them. This is obviously an inhuman act that should be condemned in its entirety. Victims actually needed to be cared for, possibly rehabilitated and given some measure of attention and protection from trauma associated with traditions and belief system of some societies especially in Africa. On the basis of this, it was recommended that appropriate support services should be granted victims. In addition to having their cases investigated and persecuted, victims of sexual violence must be afforded appropriate support service, including psycho-social counselling, legal aid, emergency medical care and reproductive health services responsive to the devastating effects of sexual violence, including unwanted pregnancies, sexually-transmitted

diseases and genital mutilation. This will go along way in providing necessary support and show high level of care and sense of belonging to the victims.

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