

*Full Length Research Paper*

# A study on men's attitude and awareness of gender-based violence against women in Amarata community, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Men have been long known to be aggressive against their women folks in many African societies. In many cases they do so to demonstrate their superior masculinity which results to physical attack, abuse, neglect and relegation of their women to the background and only appreciated as an object for sex. Thus this study seeks to determine men's attitude and knowledge towards gender based violence against women in the study area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This descriptive survey study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique in the selection of 200 men aged 25-55 years from an estimate of 1000 men that resides in the 7 compounds that participated in Amarata community, Yenagoa. With a structured questionnaire, the data gathered were analyzed using inferential and descriptive statistics. Results reveal that men in Amarata community encourage and practice gender based violence against their women. Thus, this study suggests a need for vigilance and education and desperate effort to prevent and put a stop to its continuity.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Gender based Violence, Knowledge, Women, Men, Bayelsa State.

## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a huge public health problem and a long time concern in many African and international communities. Violence against women is not a new problem (OECD Development Centre, 2013), but deeply rooted in many cultural and traditional values. It is regarded a normal attitude or remains hidden or tacitly condone (Nnadi, 2012; Zimmerman, 1997), therefore men demonstrate their masculine dominant role and supremacy over their women with especially the rural women facing all types of violation in their life (Safe World Field Partners [SWFP], 2013; Asia Pacific Women's Watch [APWW], 2004). Violence against women is the most pervasive violation of human right (United Nation Secretary General, 2009; Heise et al., 2002). It is the range of abuses committed against women that stem from gender inequality and women's subordinate status in a society relative to men (SWFP, 2013). It has devastating health impact on the woman, as women are mostly controlled and dominated by their partners in a relationship and must never complain of sexual harassment and in case of childlessness; the

woman must accept it as her fault (Gomez, 1993; Kohler-Reissman, 2000). However, gender based violence is practiced against everyone, but affects mainly women and girls (Jekayinfa, 2011; IGWG/USAID, 2008) and is carried out in all settings, including work places, schools, families, and communities. It is inhuman to discriminate against the girl child as seen in our societies where men are more enrolled in schools than the females. But from the earliest beginning, women were discriminated against such that males had more access to western education (Abdullahi, 2003) and generally unfavourable attitude are expressed towards the education of women and girls (Oniye, 2004). Furthermore, families with only girls' are stigmatized (Mutahir, 2013) because of the preference of sons over daughters. There is the growing recognition that the role of men is crucial in changing these unequal power relations. These include involving men in movements to end violence against women, focusing on men's roles and responsibilities, and putting an emphasis on men as part of the solution

to combat violence against women (Cornell, 2003; Flood, 2005). Research in governance targeted at the participation of women in development have recognized the huge burden confronting women folks relating to participation and decision making process. Therefore, there is a need for the creation of a ministry for women affairs and social development, as one step towards improving the lots of women and also check the disparity between men and women by way of gender violence in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, by avoiding institutional structures that results in disparities or stigmatization in services and transforming social institutions to prevent violence against women and girls and improving development. This has left one wondering if there is any significant improvement on the attitude of men towards gender violence against women in Amarata community, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State; a strategy that is expected to improve the wellbeing of women generally. This research is therefore designed to study the knowledge and attitude of men towards gender violence against women in Amarata community of Bayelsa State.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- I. To determine the men's knowledge of the practice of gender violence against women in Amarata community.
- II. To determine the men's attitude towards gender violence against women in Amarata community.
- III. To determine how gender violence against women is practiced by men in Amarata community.
- IV. To discover why and where gender violence is carried against women in Amarata community

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Amarata- Bayelsa State a community of the Epie speaking people of Yanagoa municipal. This community occupies a central place in the map of Yenagoa and it is internally divided into seven compounds with representative family heads as leaders in control. The people of Epie are predominantly farmers and traders. However, there are civil servants, business men and women. A descriptive survey design was employed, while adopted a multi-stage sampling technique in the selection of 200 men aged 25-55 years from an estimate of 1000 men that were engaged for study by using at first, a stratified probability sampling for each of the 7 compounds as a stratum and secondly systematically sampling where the  $n^{\text{th}}$  number is equal to "3". So that at the count of every,  $n^{\text{th}}$  number a subject was selected, until the desired sample size for each stratum was attained. A carefully constructed questionnaire to illicit information from the men made up of two sections was used. Section "A" contains the demographic data of respondents while section "B"

consisted of questionnaire items on knowledge and attitude of men towards gender violence against women. The questionnaire items were carefully selected and designed to answer each of the research questions. It consists of structured questions (close ended questions) with "yes" and "no" options and also some multiple choice questions at other times.

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents face-to-face by the investigators. They were retrieved on the spot after each was properly filled by the respondents which allowed for 100% retrieval. All subjects were fully informed about the study and their participation was voluntary. The Chiefs and Youth leaders, permissions were also sought before entering the community. The data generated in the course of carrying out this research was tallied and presented into frequency distribution tables. Data collected were analyzed and processed using descriptive statistical methods manually.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the age distribution of respondents, 12% are 25-30 years old, 22% are 31-35years old, 38% are 36-40years old, and 28% are 41 & above years. Seventy percent of respondents were married, 22% were single, and 8% were divorce or separated. The educational status shows that 6% of respondents had no schooling, 4% had primary education, 18% had secondary education and 72% had tertiary level of education. By occupation 14% of respondents were students, 22% were traders/business men, while 12% of respondents were force or military men, and 52% of were civil servants.

Table 2 shows that 40% of the respondents have heard about gender violence while 60% have not heard about gender violence practice, whom were also included in the study. Similarly, 60% of the respondents knew about fighting or beating up women as gender violence, whereas 40% did not know that fighting or beating up women was gender violence. Thirteen percent had knowledge that denying women some basic privileges men enjoy was gender violence, while 87% had no knowledge that denying women basic privileges was gender violence. Only 16% had knowledge that treating women as second class citizen in the society was gender violence, while 83% did not know this. More than half, 53% knew that any discrimination on the ground of being females is gender violence, whereas 65% had no knowledge about any discrimination on the ground of being female is gender violence.

The table 3 shows the respondents' preference of men over women in leadership positions, 54% preferred men over women in positions of leadership, while 46% indicated no preference of men over women in

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristic of respondent Men in Amarata, Yenagoa (N=200)

Variables	f	%
<b>Age ( years)</b>		
25-30	12	12
31-35	22	22
36-40	38	38
41& Above	28	28
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	70	70
Single	22	22
Divorced/Separated	8	8
Widower	0	0
<b>Educational Status</b>		
No schooling	6	4
Primary	4	18
Secondary	18	72
Tertiary	72	
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil Servant	6	54
Traders/Businessmen	22	22
Force/ Military Men	12	12
Students	14	14

**Table2.** Men's Knowledge of Practice of gender violence against women in Amarata, Yenagoa (N=200)

Questions/ statements	f (Yes/No)	%
Have you heard about gender violence	40.5	40.5
	59.5	59.5
Fighting/beating up women	60.0	60.5
	40.0	40.5
Denying women some basic privileges men enjoy	13.0	13.0
	87.0	87.0
Treating women as second class citizen in the society	16.5	16.5
	83.5	83.5
Any discrimination against women on the grounds that they are female human being	35.0	35.0
	65.0	65.0

leadership positions. The respondents' attitude to equal sexual rights between men and women in society, 44% of respondents, said yes and 56%, who said no to equal sex rights between men and women. With regards to women expressing themselves on what is right and wrong in society, 38% of respondents said yes and 62% said no. However, only 18% said that it was improper to beat a wife while 82% said that it was not improper to beat up a wife. With 65% are of the perception that gender violence is negative in the society as compared to 35% who perceived gender violence as not negative in the

society. Less than half 40% of the respondents said allowing women equal opportunity in life is good while 60% said allowing women equal opportunity in life is not good.

Table 4 shows how gender violence against women has been practiced in Amarata community. The results show that 16% of respondents practice gender violence against women by beating up their wives in the house; 14% do not allow women to express their sexual desires in their relationship. 20% do not allow women to

**Table 3.** Men's Attitude towards gender violence against women In Amarata, Yenagoa (N=200)

Questions/ statements	f (Yes/ No)	%
Do you prefer men to women in leadership position with the same qualifications?	54.5	54.5
Should women have equal sexual right as men?	45.5	45.5
Can women express themselves on what is right and wrong in society?	43.5	43.5
Is it proper for a man to beat up his wife?	56.5	56.5
Gender violence against women is a negative trend in society	38.0	38.0
Allowing women equal opportunity in life is good	62.0	62.0
	18.0	18.0
	82.0	82.0
	65.0	65.0
	35.0	35.0
	40.5	40.5
	59.5	59.5

**Table 4.** How gender violence is practiced against women in Amarata Community (N= 200)

QUESTIONS/ STATEMENTS	F (YES)	%
Beat them up in the house as wives	16	16
Do not allow them to express their sexual desire in men / women relationship	14	14
Do not allow women to handle leadership positions	20	20
Women are supposed to serve the men always (even if she is sick)	15	15
Total	100	100

**Table 5.** Why and Where gender violence is carried against women in Amarata Community (N=200)

Questions/ Statements	f	% Yes
Women are the weaker sex and so they must be controlled	30	30
The role of women in society is just to make the man happy	11	11
Women are not as men	34	34
Women do not deserve a self-worth as individuals	10	10
Women are being discriminated often first because our culture says so	15	15
Total	100	100
Work place	40	40
Community social activities	10	10
Community policy making process	10	10
Family decision making process	25	25
Religious Affiliations	15	15
Total	100	100

handle leadership positions, and 50% make women to serve them all the time (even if she is sick). The table 5 shows respondents` reasons on why gender violence against women is being practiced by men in Amarata community, 30% of the respondents gave the reason that women are the weaker sex and so must be controlled. For 11% of the respondents, the role of

women in society is just to make the man happy, 34% said that women are not as men; also another 10% gave the reason that womendo not deserve a self-worth as individuals and a further 15% gave the reason that women are being discriminated often just because our culture says so. With regards to where gender violence is practiced against women by men in Amaratacommunity

40% respondents said that the workplace is where gender violence is practiced against women, while 10% said the community social activities as where gender violence is practiced and 10% said that the community policy making process is where gender violence is practiced against women, 25% said family decision making process is where gender violence occur, and 15% said religious affiliations is where gender violence occur.

## DISCUSSIONS

Our results reveal that majority 60% of the respondents have not heard about gender based violence. But whom were also included in the study knew that fighting or beating up women 60%, denying women some basic privileges men enjoy 13%, treating women as a second class citizens in the society 17% and any form of discrimination against women on the ground they are female human beings 35% was gender violence against women. These results may have been influenced by the cultural belief systems common among the Epie-people in Amara community, Bayelsa State. Furthermore, our results concurs with previous reports that have shown that gender based violence against women is perpetuated by males who seek power and control (UNFPA, 2013, United Nation, 1993a) and, where traditionally there has been a high level of acceptance of male violence against women (Lievore and Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2007). Our results are dissimilar to a report on understanding of who perpetrates and who is affected by violence, amongst male and female where most respondents (76 percent) understood that mainly men perpetrate domestic violence, and the overwhelming majority of victims are women (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2009).

Our result reveals a negative attitude towards women as men is preferred over women in leadership positions, have negative attitude to equal sex rights and expressions of women, and supports beating up wives and gender violence in the society and an attitude not to allow women equal opportunity of good life. The result of this study is consistent with earlier research findings from Bangladesh, where men have negative attitudes towards women and are likely to use violence against women (Icddr, b, 2011), as well as have a degree of social acceptance of wife beating practices and gender inequitable attitudes as very common practices among men (Icddr, b, 2011; Manju et al, 2004). This means that men almost in these areas supported at least one gender based statement against women folks. A consistent finding in attitudinal research is that being male or female is a significant predictor of attitudes toward violence against women. However, Flood and Pease (2006) noted that beliefs about the roles of men

and women are an important predictor of attitudes toward violence against women. For example, those who support more traditional gender roles have greater acceptance of violence against women; those with more egalitarian beliefs about gender roles have less acceptance of violence against women.

The result of this study on how gender violence is practiced in the community shows that gender violence is perpetrated through fighting/ beating of women, not allowing women to express their sexual desires in a man/ woman relationships, not allowing women to handle leadership positions, and believing that women are supposed to serve men even when they are sick. This implies that generally, respondents think that gender violence against women is not just fighting and beating up women only, but that women are also expected to play a subservient role to a man which is socially acceptable in the community. This is in conformity with United Nation statements which note that in some countries close to 60% of women may be subjected to physical violence at least once in their life time (United Nations, 2005). Another study found that 15 to 71% of women experience physical or sexual violence or both from their intimate partners in their lifetime (García-Moreno et al., 2005). This is in agreement with the practice of woman or wife beatings or other forms of violence by husbands or partners reported in this study. The study findings also concur with reports of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in the United States, where a woman is beaten every 18 minutes and domestic violence regarded as the leading cause of injury among women of reproductive age and increase visit to emergency rooms (United Nation, 1996). Our result reveals why gender violence is being practiced, we found that 30% of the respondents subscribed to the belief that women are the weaker sex and they must be controlled; as well as that the role of the women in the society is just to make the man happy 11%. Other reasons given why gender violence is practiced is that women are not as men 34%, women do not deserve a self-worth as individuals, and that women are being discriminated often first because our culture says so 15%. These statements concur with the 2009 United Nations Human Rights document report on legal traditions that continue to institutionalize the second class status for women and girls (UNHR, 2009). Many cultures have beliefs, norms, and social institutions that legalize and perpetuate violence against women (Heise et al., 1999) contrary to the views of the United Nations Declaration of 1993. The United Nations Declaration on the elimination of violence against women (1993) states that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relation between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women and

that violence against women is one of the crucial social act. However, the major causes of violence against women includes the personality or behaviour of the abuser as the root cause alongside stress, addiction/substance abuse and family history of violence, as well as feelings of jealousy, possessiveness, and being controlling, are also why violence against women is practiced (Harris/ Decima Research Report, 2009; Hagemann-White, 2010).

Our result in this study reveals that 40% of gender violence practiced against women took place in the workplace, 10% in community social activities and in the community policy making process respectively, 25% at the family decision making process and 15% indicated religious affiliations as where gender violence is being practiced against women. The reasons for these findings cannot be far fetched, because this is asocio-cultural practices that have been deeply rooted in the tradition and belief systems that have spanned generations (Maluleke, 2012), are still practiced up-to-date based on the fact that men have always being the head and leaders of women in African community. Other reasons that could explain this findings is that the integrity of a woman can easily be influenced and misinterpreted besides the beliefs that they are emotionally attached and as such it could affect their decisions and impact on change.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study on men`s attitude and knowledge towards gender based violence against women in Amarata community, found that men of do practice gender violence against women in various forms and ways and encourage gender violence against women despite existing local and international laws to control and prevent violence.

Based on the foregoing findings, we conclude that the men of Amarata community practice violence against women in various forms and ways. Our findings reveals that gender violence is practiced in its various forms to include wife beating, not allowing women to handle leadership positions, not allowing women to express their sexual desires expecting women to serve the men always, treating women as second class citizens; denying women some basic privileges that the men enjoy; and, discriminating against women on the grounds that they are female human beings.

The study also found that gender violence against women is practiced mostly in the work place mainly because women are the weaker sex and are not as men. This means that to reduce or tackle the incidences of gender violence against women, men participation is necessary to bring to an end of this practice. The need for men to change by putting a stop to their negative attitudes and practices to gender

violence against women in the community is therefore advocated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Based on the study findings there is the need for the sensitization of adults and adolescents males in communities on gender violence against women by means of mass media, workshops, seminars and teachings so that they understand what is gender violence and stop the practice.
- (2) Cultural practices that abuse the dignity and pride of a woman and subjects her to a subservient role should be relegated to the background and dealt with accordingly, according to the laws and declarations of United Nations Organizations on elimination of such practices
- (3) Men should join in the forefront to fight all forms discrimination against the woman by way of gender violence against the woman and eliminate it through public enlightenment on gender inequality and its implications, as well as the establishments of relationships with local leaders of the communities.

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