

**ENHANCING SAFETY AND SECURITY ON UNIVERSITY
CAMPUSES FOR WOMEN**

A KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

BY

PROFESSOR CHIOMA KANU AGOMO

AT

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Protocol

I wish to thank the Shehu Musa Yaradua Foundation (SMYF) for their gracious invitation to give the keynote address at this Gender Justice Roundtable.

Stating the Obvious

It is common knowledge that tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been in the news of recent, not for the best of reasons, but as bastions of gender-based violence across campuses. Violence perpetrated takes various forms, from the apparently innocuous touch, to physical violence which includes sexual harassment and rape.

Although, gender-based violence (GBV) is known to exist, the extent to which it exists, and the effect on those at the receiving end, who are mostly women, has been downplayed, consciously and unconsciously. There is a lot of window dressing just to give an appearance of action. This failure to give GBV the kind of attention and treatment it deserves has created what I can only describe as a crisis of erosion of confidence in the system to protect those who are vulnerable to violence. It has made the university environment unsafe and unhealthy for women. GBV has made campuses toxic. I must add that this sad situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. It can be described as a global pandemic.

Research Findings

There is a fair amount of evidence-based research findings which confirm what is already known. The following are just a few examples. Zubairu Iliyasu, et al, in their research on the prevalence of gender-based violence among female students in Northern Nigeria, established an overall prevalence rate of 58.8% of gender based violence among female university students in 2011. The researchers used self-administered questionnaires to determine the prevalence and risk factors among 300 level female students in Kano. The findings showed that 22.8%, 22.2%, and 50% experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence respectively. They identified religious affiliation, ethnicity, "indigeneship", marital status, campus residence and faculty affiliations as significant risk factors. (*Prevalence and Correlates of Gender-Based Violence Among Female Students in Northern Nigeria, Afr. J. Reproductive Health 2011 Sept, 15 (3) 111-9*).

Similarly, another study in 2014, by Joseph Umana, et al, which focused on the prevalence of intimate partner violence towards undergraduate and postgraduate female students of the University of Ibadan, found the prevalence rate to be 42.3%. The study also pointed out the paucity of information on intimate partner violence burden and experience among young women in courtship and dating relationships in the University. 1100 undergraduate and 255 postgraduate students from the University of Ibadan were involved in the study. (*Prevalence*

and Correlates of intimate Partner Violence towards Female Students of the University of Ibadan Nigeria, BMC Women's Health 2014 Dec. 8:14 131 doi, 10.1186/1472-6674 14-131).

A more recent study by Olaoluwa Samson Agbaje, Chinenye Kalu Arua, Joshua Emeka Umeifekwem et al, on work-place gender-based violence and associated factors, among university women in Enugu, South East Nigeria found different prevalence rates for various forms of gender based violence and harassment. 339 female staff from public and private universities in Enugu were involved in the study. The prevalence rate for incivility was 63.8%, 58.8% for bullying and 40.5% for sexual harassment. The overall conclusion as can be expected, was that the prevalence of GBV in the universities was high. (BMC Women's Health 2021.Mar. 23:21(1);124 doi:10.86/512905-021-01273-w)

U.S.A. and Europe

In 2015, more than 150,000 students from 27 universities in the United States took part in a study on sexual assault and sexual misconduct conducted by the Association of American Universities (AAU). The study indicated that 23% of female undergraduate and graduate students across the 27 universities had experienced some form of violence, from forced kissing, to touching to rape carried out by force or under threat of force, or while incapacitated from alcohol or drugs. Responses from about 21,000 students from German, British, Italian, Spanish and Polish students who took part in a study on gender-based violence against female students at European university settings, indicated that sexual violence was a major problem in European universities, and that it was yet to be recognised as such. The study also noted that the issue was compounded because it was generally suppressed or concealed by universities. (*Gender-Based Violence, Against Female Students in European University Settings, Katrin List, Ruhr –University, Bochum Germany (2017)*)

Gender-Based Violence is a Human Rights Issue

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) identified GBV as one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world. (<https://www.unfpa.org>). According to UNICEF, GBV is the most pervasive yet least visible human rights violation in the world. (<https://www.unicef.org>). All the studies also clearly identified GBV as both a health and human rights issue.

The spectrum of violence include physical, sexual, verbal, psychological and emotional violence, threats, coercion, bullying. They negatively impact women's mental, physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing, as well as their productivity economically and educationally. It impairs their quality of life, sense of self –worth and dignity. The tragedy as has been stated earlier is that it is not treated with the seriousness that it deserves. This is largely due to the patriarchal nature of our society. The truth is that we cannot separate GBV from the nature of our society. The norms, the culture and the gender stereotypes

engendered by the structure of the society, sometimes, make the violators of women and girls, victims of their environment. This must be borne in mind as we seek ways to enhance security and safety on our campuses. Before I proffer my suggestions, I want to give some examples of incidence of GBV I was aware of, and how they were handled.

Real Life Cases

The general lack of sincerity and seriousness in the treatment of reported cases erodes confidence and heightens sense of insecurity among female students. There is also this fear of further victimisation. This is real enough to keep a victim from reporting the harassment and thereby open the door to repeated violence. I was reliably informed of a case where a young female undergraduate student was subjected to further repeated sexual violence by the original perpetrator and his friends on and off campus on demand after the original attack. It took the motherly instinct and tact of a Counsellor to get the victim to open up. One sad aspect of that case was that it was a so called friend, a female, who set her up for the initial attack. Mind the company you keep. Silence empowers the perpetrator and perpetuates the culture of impunity. End this culture of violence.

A mother came to my office and reported that her daughter was being harassed by one of her lecturers. After narrating her story, she told me that she did not want the matter to go further because she was afraid that if the matter was escalated, it might adversely affect the student who was her only child. She therefore begged me not to take it up for fear of victimisation. I reassured her of her daughter safety, and I did take it up privately with the alleged harasser. He did not admit any wrong doing, but he gave an undertaking not to harass the student. Again, like the first example it was the female friends of this young girl who were the ones trying to entice her to go for tutorials in the lecturer's office at an ungodly hour. Mind the company you keep.

In another case, a postgraduate student came to my office and asked to be reassigned to another lecturer for her project supervision. She alleged that her supervisor was constantly harassing her. He wanted her to be his second wife and even though she was not interested, he would not let up. I told her to call the lecturer in my presence and put the speaker on. She did. This enabled me to take steps to shield the student from further harassment from that particular lecturer.

The Roundtable Focus

The focus of this roundtable is how to enhance security and safety of women on our campuses. It is indeed a welcome step and adds a powerful voice to the already growing voices demanding action on gender-based violence against women. For example, African Women on Board (AWB) has carried out studies, activities including podcasts on violence against women. They confirm the prevalence of physical and psychological GBV in higher

institutions in Nigeria. AWB is keen to partner with other stakeholders and interest groups to come up with initiatives that can lead to greater awareness of the problem amongst students at all levels.

This roundtable brings together female decision- makers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and other stakeholders including working on similar interventions. This provides a fertile ground for the sharing of ideas, and establishing a network of practitioners that can serve as mentors. These and other articulated plans are commendable. They highlight in my opinion, the point that existence of sexual harassment policies and touting of zero tolerance to sexual harassment, to whoever cares to listen is not enough. It is now as clear as the day that something more is needed. It must now be recognised that the solution does not lie in unilateral approach by individual universities. A concerted, comprehensive and community based approach is required.

Think Global act Local

I came across an interesting document online titled “Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Guide To A Comprehensive Model”. It is said to be “based on the most up-to-date research and evidence-based practices for the broad diffusion of community norms and institutional policies and practices related to intervention and prevention on campuses. The Guide identified three evidence-based practices. One of them, the survivor –centred approach model seeks to help campuses “build partnerships to develop and adopt policies that more effectively treat various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) as serious offences, ensure survivor safety and offender accountability.” Part of the strategy is to provide a framework where individual key players and campus leaders would play key roles as change agents. This is a mentorship role, which seeks to bring about attitudinal changes and behaviours necessary to engender a critical mass of change agents. I think there is a lot that can be gleaned from this for our use.

It is important to note that this Guide is developed from several years of collaborative work with U.S. campus based research grantees who were funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence against Women (OVW). The ultimate goal of the comprehensive studies was the reduction of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking on campuses. This buttresses the need for a community of action involving stakeholders at different levels - Government, the organised Private sector, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), private individuals, universities and others.

The University Campus is a Workplace

University campuses are workplaces. This is a fact. This therefore brings them within the ambit of International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment, 2019. The GBV campaign relating to university campuses and other tertiary

institutions should take leaf from it. Campus based GBV should be recognised for what it is –a violation of the victim’s right to human dignity, right to freedom from discrimination and a threat to equal opportunities.

Convention 190 is the first international treaty to address violence in the workplace. Article 1 defines violence and harassment, and gender –based violence. The Convention applies to violence and harassment in the world of work occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work. Article 4 stipulates the principles, and these fit neatly into any framework for enhancing security and welfare of the workplace. It enjoins each Member which has ratified the Convention to “respect, promote, and realize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment”. It goes further to mandate each Member to “adopt, in accordance with national law and circumstances and in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organisations, an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work”. Such an approach is to take into account violence and harassment involving third parties, where applicable, and includes:

- (a) prohibiting in law violence and harassment;
- (b) ensuring that relevant policies address violence and harassment;
- (c) adopting a comprehensive strategy in order to implement measures to prevent and combat violence and harassment;
- (d) establishing or strengthening enforcement and monitoring mechanisms;
- (e) ensuring access to remedies and support for victims;
- (f) providing for sanctions;
- (g) developing tools, guidance, education and training, raising awareness, in accessible formats as appropriate ; and
- (h) ensuring effective means of inspection and investigation of cases of violence and harassment...

I strongly believe that Convention 190 and the accompanying Recommendation 206 provide the blueprint for enhancing safety and security of women on university campuses because campuses are workplaces. The preamble to the Convention is particularly instructive because it articulates the rationale and the context. It reminds us that we are dealing with core human rights issues as reflected in various United Nations instruments. We are reminded that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both material well-being and their spiritual [and educational] development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity. We are reminded of other relevant international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It acknowledges among others, that violence and harassment in the world of work affects a person’s psychological, physical and sexual health, dignity, and family and social environment. It recognises that violence and harassment affects the quality of public and private services, and may prevent persons, particularly women, from accessing, and remaining and advancing further.

Above all, it acknowledges that gender-based violence and harassment disproportionately affects women and girls, and recognises that only an inclusive, integrated and gender-based responsive approach, which tackles underlying causes and risk factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power-relations, is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work, which I must stress again, includes university campuses.

Concluding Thoughts

Enhancing safety and security of university campuses for women is not a task for individual universities alone. It starts from there, but it continues far beyond individual campuses. Beyond the campuses, governments at all levels must be actively involved. There must be a coalition of private and public institutions. Civil Society organisations, regional organisations and sub- regional organisations must be involved.

The Covid-19 pandemic, Ebola outbreak, HIV/ AIDS and other similar health and safety issues in times past, and in the present were, and are, not treated as individual country, or regional matter. They have all seen as global issues and tackled as such for effective outcomes. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is in the same league as these pandemics. It must be treated as such.

Thank you for listening.