

Understanding the Role of the Nigerian Police Force Gender Unit in Addressing Violence Against Women in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Violence against Women is one of the most widespread violations of basic human rights. Most researchers emphasize on the problem of GBV, its causes and what ought to be done in eradicating it. Although some of these suggestions such as; the creation of a Police Gender Desk among others, have been put in place, the question as to their effectiveness and whether or not they are functioning according to their mandate is yet to be answered. Objectives: the study identified the mandate of the Nigerian Police Force Gender Unit; examined the nature and dynamics of VAW cases handled by the Gender Unit of Ekiti State Police Command and examined the effectiveness and challenges of the Gender Unit of Ekiti State Police Command in handling VAW cases. Methods: The researcher employed a case study research design. The researcher interviewed a total number of 13 key informants. Content analysis and Narrative analysis were used to analyse data. Findings: It showed that there was no clearly defined mandate specifically for the Gender Unit. It was also discovered that majority of the cases were rape and defilement while domestic violence was the least reported case. This study suggested that the Gender Unit environment was not conducive for VAW cases because the survivor's privacy was not upheld. Conclusion: The Gender Unit might not be effective on its own. The approach should be holistic and involve all actors. The response should include referring the individual survivors for specialized services such as psycho-social support, medical attention, and legal representation among others. Members of community and local system should also be sensitized for effective prevention of VAW. With the networking of all these actors, VAW would

be effectively addressed. There is also need for improvements in terms of the professionalism of the officers at the Gender Unit.

Keywords: Violence, GBV, VAWG, Ado-Ekiti, Nigerian Police Force

Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW) has been a global phenomenon; around the world, girls and women continue to experience gender-based violence over the life cycle in homes, schools, churches, workplaces, the streets and even therapeutic settings (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottemoeller, 1999). A recent transnational review of population-based survey data found the lifetime proportion of women experiencing physical assault by an intimate partner to range from 10% to 69% (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002).

Fisher (2000) defined violence as actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full human potential. Thus, any of the aforementioned acts of violence perpetrated on an individual on the basis of gender, is considered Gender Based Violence (GBV).

According to Violence against Women Resource Guide, the terms "Gender Based Violence" (GBV) and "Violence Against Women" (VAW) are often used interchangeably, since most Gender Based Violence is perpetrated by men against women. GBV, however, includes violence against men, boys, and sexual minorities or those with gender-nonconforming identities. As such, Violence Against Women (VAW) is classified as a type of GBV. While violence against the other groups mentioned is often rooted in the same gender inequalities and harmful gender norms (Violence against Women Resource Guide, 2019). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), reports of the violence to which many women are daily subjected first emerged in the 1970s (UNODC, 2010).

The African Union report on women's right (2016) stated that; in Africa, 1 in 3 women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lifetime, in six African countries there is no legal

protection for women against domestic violence. In 2013, African women and girls accounted for 62% (179,000) of all global deaths from preventable causes including acts of violence against women. Globally, an estimated 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, most of them in Africa and 125 million African women and girls alive today were recorded to have become married before the age of 18 (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2016).

Gender Based Violence (GBV), a growing public health and human right problem both globally and in Nigeria, affects women and girls mostly as about 1 in 3 women are said to have experienced a form of GBV (National Population Commission (NPC, 2014). Ongoing efforts in the country to respond to GBV include passage of the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act, increased social and legislative advocacy, establishment of gender and family units in the police, advocating for male participation and provision of support services by NGOs (Federal Ministry of Women and Social Development (FMWASD), 2015).

Hence, in 2010, the NPF launched a "gender policy" in an effort to reduce gender discrimination within the force and enhance the capacity of officers to handle gender-based violence cases (This Day Live, 2012). The Police Force as an institution is a major stakeholder in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, guided by its mandate to maintain peace and uphold fundamental rights to freedom and good governance. It is on this premise that UN Women in Nigeria in collaboration with other development partners, especially United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided technical support for the development of the "Gender Policy for the Nigeria Police Force" (Ongile, 2010). The Policy is also a response to the National Gender Policy which clearly recognizes that operational procedures and protocols within most law enforcement agencies are biased in favour of men and calls on stakeholders to provide support for addressing such gaps (Ongile, 2010).

Through this policy, the Nigerian Police Force, a major security organ of the Nigerian government, was positioned to achieve social, cultural, and ideological transformation in gender relations within the NPF as well as in the larger Nigerian society, through gender

sensitive regulations and orders, and improved technical skills in gender mainstreaming and in the handling of gender-based violence (Hafiz, 2010).

Dynamics of GBV in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as in many other African countries, reports reveal a “shockingly high” level of violence against women (NPC and United Nations Population Fund, 2014). Shaming and self-flagellation not only create further damage to a victimized person, but they increase the number of unreported rape and assault. Without reporting, women are unable to get the assistance they desperately need, and the abusers go unnoticed and unpunished, free to continue to victimize women (Douglas, 2014). When we analyse statistics drawn from official reports, we are already examining a much narrower margin than actually exists (Douglas, 2014). Therefore, if our systems for gathering this data are flawed, our margin of error increases even more dramatically. Such flawed data prevents our society from grasping the severity of the problem, thereby limiting the amount of monetary and judicial resources delegated to addressing violence against women (Douglas, 2014).

Similarly, representatives of the Legal Defence Assistant Project (LEDAP) revealed that, criminal justice in our country provides almost no protection for women from violence (Ezeilo 2006). He further added that: police and courts often dismiss domestic violence as family matters and fail to investigate (Ezeilo 2006). In a same perspective, Ajoni (2008) supported this position explaining that the poor response of law enforcement agents leads to low reporting. Other challenges in this are rape, and other sexual offence, human trafficking and cultural practices (child marriage, female Genital Mutilation, widowhood practices). The US State Department (2014) country report for Nigeria noted, ‘Police often refused to intervene in domestic disputes or blamed the victim for provoking the abuse. Cultural violence is seen in the rural areas, as the courts and police were reluctant to intervene to protect women who formally accused their husbands of abuse if the level of alleged abuse did not exceed customary norms in the areas (US State Department, 2014; Galtung 1990).

In October 2014, the Nigerian police "reconstituted" the Force Gender Unit (FGU) to help bring justice for victims of gender-based crimes (NPF 2014; CLEEN Foundation 2014). This was done to aid in stemming the tides of violence against women and girls in Nigeria (Gender Hub, 2014). According to CLEEN Foundation, the FGU is expected to ensure the implementation of a robust capacity building plan for officers in gender related issues and ensure the establishment of Gender Desk officers in Police formations nationwide. As Police Gender Desks are focal points where GBV cases are reported, investigated and perpetrators are charged accordingly (Ndugu 2012). It is also saddled with the responsibility to ensure the inclusion of gender training in Nigeria Police curriculum at all levels and enhance the already existing collaboration with other stakeholders in the area of gender equality (CLEEN Foundation, 2014). All these were tailored towards helping to get justice for victims of gender-based crimes and to mitigate the increasing number of the GBV.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to identify the mandate and role of the Nigerian Police Force Gender Unit, examine the nature and dynamics of VAW cases in Nigeria and to understand the challenges faced by the Force Gender Unit of the Nigerian Police in handling VAW cases.

Scope of the Study

The study is carried out in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, South-West, Nigeria. Its focus is on the Gender Unit of the Ekiti State Police Command in a bid to fulfil the stated objectives, over the period of 2014 to 2019. This study was exploratory in nature whereby the use of a qualitative research approach was employed. Hence, the researchers employed a case study research design to ensure that the topic of interest was well explored and understood through a variety of lenses and research tools. The gender unit of Ekiti State Police Command was used as a case so as to enable the researcher to solicit in-depth information from various officials and determine other respondents' response on the subject matter in the study area. The study targeted the following key informants; Police Gender Unit officials, State Ministry of Women

Affairs officials, NGOs advocating against VAW, females who advocate against VAW and women who have been victims of VAW.

In this study, the use of purposive random sampling technique was employed to pick the Police Gender Unit of Ekiti State Police Command, officers of the gender unit, NGOs and for the data collection process. This was based on the availability of the Organisations in the area of study. The researcher was able to select 4 NGOs working on VAW in Ekiti State, the FGU of the Ekiti State Police Command, the State Ministry of Women Affairs, Police Cottage Hospital and the Office of the First Lady of Ekiti State. In total, the researcher interviewed 13 key informants to the point of saturation. The researcher collected both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using semi-structured (in-depth) interview. Four different interview guides were designed according to the different categories of key informants. The questions in the interview guides were in line with the research objectives and research questions of this study.

Content analysis was used to analyse documented data collected during the study. Narrative analysis was also used to analyse the responses gotten from interviews. The results were afterwards presented thematically.

Conceptual Clarifications

Violence as a Concept

Most attempts to define violence tend to combine the idea of an act of physical force with a violation (Vittorio, 2005). For example, Ted Honderich (2002) defines violence as “a use of physical force that injures, damages, violates or destroys people or things”. Manfred Steger (2003), points out that violence comprises a range of meanings, including “to force”, “to injure”, “to dishonour”, and “to violate”. Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (2002) in the World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH) as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”. The United States Institute of Peace (2011) describes violence as “psychological or physical force exerted

for the purpose of injuring, damaging, or abusing people or property (Akinyoade, 2016).

However, Fisher's definition is one that captures violence in all of its forms. He defined violence as "actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full human potentials (Fisher, 2002).

Violence has various forms, these are:

a) Physical Violence

It is also known as *direct* or *behavioural violence*. It is the use of physical force against another's body, against that person's will, and that is expected to inflict physical injury or death upon that person (Bond, 1994). It involves direct harm to someone's body or mind. That is, violation of an individual as in torture, mutilation, rape or beating to exert coercive influence and ultimately a threat to life itself (killing) (Akinyoade, 2016).

b) Structural Violence

According to Johan Galtung, it refers to unjust, unequal and unrepresentative social structures and processes and situations. It involves creating social, economic, and political asymmetries and injustices that keep individuals and groups from reaching their full potentials as humans (Galtung 1990). Structural violence manifests as marginalization, oppression, disempowerment, suppression and discrimination among others. It is created by the instrumentalities of laws, rules, policies, and actions of government, organizations, communities, families, groups and individuals that favour certain individuals or groups at the expense of others, or give them undue advantage over others (Akinyoade, 2016).

Direct violence is horrific, but its brutality usually gets our attention: we notice it, and often respond to it. Structural violence, however, is almost always invisible, embedded in existing social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience. Structural violence occurs whenever people are disadvantaged by political, legal, economic, or cultural traditions (Christie, 2001). Unequal accesses to resources, political power, education, health care, or legal standing, are also forms of structural violence (Christie, 2001). Galtung explained:

Thus, when one person beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper class as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are not concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another (Galtung, 1969).

c) Cultural Violence

Culture represents the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic and mathematics) (Akinyoade, 2016). By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science, that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look/feel right, or at least not wrong. One-way cultural violence works is by changing the moral colour of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable (Galtung, 1990).

d) Attitudinal Violence

It refers to the less visible mental processes (feelings, attitudes and values that people hold) which may not actually be violent, but can easily become sources of violence, or allow violent behaviour and institutions to operate. Feelings of hate, fear and mistrust can allow us to classify people as inferior or superior in terms of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, political ideology, etc. This may precipitate intolerance, leading to perception of others as less human, hence, participating or justifying from the side lines, inhuman actions against them (Akinyoade, 2016).

However, Oyinloye (2018) highlighted a list of other commonly acceptable forms of violence in Africa; the use of violence to raise and correct children often through corporal punishments; the use of violence to regulate interpersonal relations; as an indispensable tool in intimate relationships also known as intimate partner violence

(IPV); as a means of disciplining students in educational institutions and also as a means of establishing social status.

Deducing from Fisher (2011) gender-based violence of can be categorially defined as all forms of violence consisting of actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and/or prevent people of a specific gender from reaching their full human potential. Thus, any of the aforementioned acts of violence perpetrated on an individual on the basis of gender, is considered Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Role of the Police Gender Unit or Desk

According to the UN women website, the Police gender desks are focal points where the GBV cases are reported, investigated and the perpetrators charged accordingly. According to United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2008), an ideal gender desk was supposed to have a minimum of the following infrastructures and equipment: A separate room for survivors to report the crime and where interviews could be conducted and evidence collected and recorded in an atmosphere of privacy. It was supposed to have transportation means to respond to reported incidents of violence, including removal of the perpetrator from the home (where applicable); to escort the survivors to other key services, such as a medical centre or shelter; and to return to the crime scene to collect further evidence; a free telephone line for survivors of violence and others to report incidents of violence and follow up on cases; a camera and basic forensic equipment to collect evidence needed for prosecution and a secure record storage space. The investigating officer was supposed to be in civilian clothing to increase a survivor's comfort in approaching security personnel.

Gender desks are expected to improve the police response to GBV survivors and to refer them to other organizations for professional services. They are expected to increase public awareness of GBV as a crime and the role of the police in assisting survivors. According to the Policy Brief-Forum against Gender Based Violence (2012), in 2012 Sri Lanka had 43 Police Women and Children's Desks (WCDs). These acted as the coordinating offices that collected data on incidents of violence against women and children.

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2010), after a GBV case was reported, the victim was expected to be separated from the perpetrator. This was because there was often unequal power and control between parties. It was the gender desk officer's (GDO) responsibility to ensure that the parties were out of sight and not hearing of each other, while keeping safety a priority. The officer was expected to identify and secure any weapons on hand to protect all persons who were present. The officer was also expected to isolate, search and secure the perpetrator (if present) and to remove him/her from the scene. The GDO was expected to make arrangements of medical examination after ensuring the safety of all the parties. The survivors were supposed to be informed of police procedures and confidentiality, and ascertain the initial facts of what had happened to identify the offence.

All Africa reported on 13 October 2014 that the Nigerian police force had reconstituted the Gender Unit of the force: 'The action was to consolidate on the gains made by the police in stemming violence against women and girls. The statement said the unit, among other things, would ensure the implementation of a robust capacity building plan for officers in gender related issues. It also said that the measure would ensure the inclusion of gender training in Nigeria Police curriculum at all levels and see to the establishment of gender desk officers in police formations nationwide.'

Theoretical Considerations

Structural Functional Theory

Functionalism, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spencer (1820-1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer 1898). The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the social institutions, or patterns of beliefs and behaviours focused on meeting social needs, such as, government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

Émile Durkheim, another early sociologist, applied Spencer's theory to explain how societies change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that society is a complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893), and that society is held together by shared values, languages, and symbols. Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. Social facts are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behaviour, while another is to preserve public health. In a healthy society, all parts work together to maintain stability, a state called dynamic equilibrium by later sociologists such as Parsons (1961).

According to Isajiw (2000) it can be said that functional analysis studies structural items of the social system in an attempt to show how they contribute towards integration or inversely disintegration of the system by either fulfilling or failing to fulfil some needs or sets of needs of the system and in an attempt to show how these contributions bear on the existence of the item in the system. In other words, the structural functionalists see society as an interrelated system in which each group plays a part and each practice helps the system to operate (Schaefer & Lamn, 1995). In this case the Nigerian Police Gender Unit and the women who are victims of violence representing the larger society are an interrelated system as espoused by the tenets of the functionalism theory.

Liberal Feminism Theory

The feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s were the beginning of the second wave of feminism. They are *Liberal feminism*, *Marxist* and *Socialist feminisms*, and *Development feminism*. Their roots were, respectively, 18th and 19th century liberal political philosophy that developed the idea of individual rights, Marx's 19th century critique of capitalism and his concept of class consciousness, and 20th century anti-colonial

politics and ideas of national development. Gender reform feminisms put women into these perspectives (Lorber, 1997).

Feminist theories attempt to describe women's oppression, explain its causes and consequences, and prescribe strategies for women's liberation (Tong, 2009). These theories, by paying close attention to structures of power and social context and by examining the real experiences of women living within these structures, suggest a method of theorizing that moves beyond the forms of individualism and abstraction that are prominent within liberalism (Schwartzman, 2006). On the basis of the root causes of women's oppression and subordination, different feminist groups have emerged in different times. Although their assumptions and interests vary, the main goal is to shun women's oppression so as to achieve gender equality.

Of the varieties of feminism, liberal feminism is the most dominant and the groundwork for other feminist groups (Enyew, 2018). Giddens (2001) defines liberal theory as a "feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment". This situation is mainly centred on the socially constructed ideology of patriarchy that perpetuates inequality between the two sexes. Liberal feminism is derived from the liberal political philosophy in the enlightenment period, and centres on the core ideas of autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship, and democracy (Tong, 2009). It is characterized by an individualistic emphasis on equality (Khattak, 2011). It is depicted as focusing on individual rights and on the concepts of equality, justice and equal opportunities, where legal and social policy changes are seen as tools for engineering women's equality with men (Maynard, 1995).

In its central assumption, liberal feminism maintains that differences between women and men are not based on biology, which basically represents reproduction differences. Hence, women should have the same rights as men, including the same educational as well as employment opportunities. Unfortunately, liberal feminism cannot overcome the prevailing belief that women and men are intrinsically different; but to a degree, it succeeds in showing that, although women are different from men, they are not inferior (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016). According to liberal feminists, female subordination is rooted in

a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance to success in the public sphere. Lack of opportunities in life chances and outcomes of women inspired liberal feminists to overcome the problem through education and law (Tong, 2009).

Findings

The first objective of the study sought to find out the mandate of the Gender Unit in order to determine if they have been functioning according to the said mandate. Although it was discovered that there is no clearly defined mandate specifically for the Gender Unit, they are required to carry out their duties according to the general code of conduct provided in the Section 4 of the Police Acts and Regulations and also work in accordance with the provisions of Section 31 of the Ekiti State Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law, 2019. Liberal Feminists focus on individual rights and on the concepts of equality, justice and equal opportunities, where legal and social policy changes are seen as tools for engineering women's equality with men (Maynard, 1995).

Feminist interventions in the law have made significant contributions to law reform in a range of areas where the law has historically denied or diminished the reality of women's lived experiences. For instance, feminist agitations have been instrumental in reforming the law around VAW by re-configuring understandings of who might plausibly be a victim of VAW. It can be seen that efforts in Ekiti State to address VAW have shifted from mere services rendered by NGOs such as counselling or psycho-social support to an increasing focus on the criminal justice system. Feminists who pursue legal reform have seen the judiciary as an arena that has the potential to provide "symbolic and actual justice for women" and "to increase public awareness of the issue of VAW.

The second objective sought to explore the nature and dynamics of cases handled by the Gender Unit. Although the FGU was reconstituted in 2014, records of cases reported at the Ekiti State-Criminal Investigation Department only dates back to 2016. This is as a result of the poor documentation done by the previous Officer in charge of the unit. However, the chart below (Fig 1.0) shows the most common forms of VAW reported as well as the number of times they

were reported. The following colours were used to represent them; blue for rape; orange for defilement; grey for domestic violence.

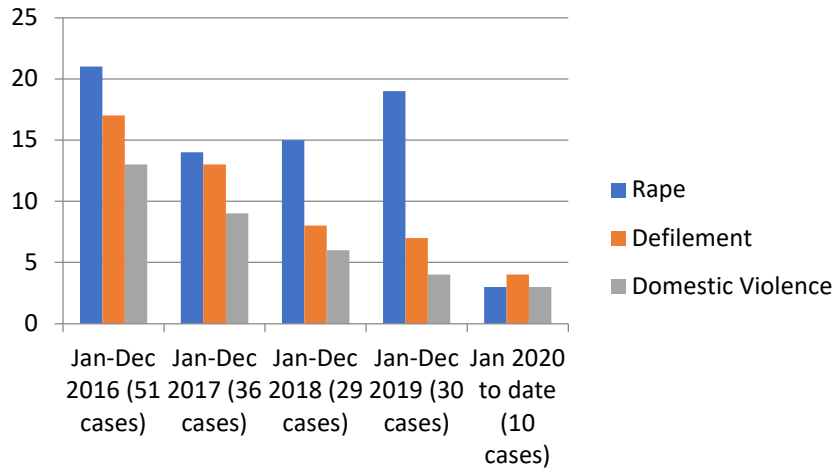


Fig 1.0 VAW cases reported at the Gender Unit from 2016 to date

From January – December 2016, a total number of 51 cases were reported at the Gender Unit; 21 were rape cases; 17 were defilement cases; 13 were domestic violence cases. From January – December 2017, a total number of 36 cases were reported at the Gender Unit; 14 were rape cases; 13 were cases of defilement and 9 domestic violence cases were reported. From January – December 2018, a total number of 29 cases were reported; 15 were rape cases; 8 were defilement cases and 6 domestic violence cases were reported. From January – December 2019, a total of 30 cases were reported; 19 of these cases were related to rape; 7 were defilement cases and 4 were domestic violence cases. From January 2020 to date, a total number of 10 cases have been reported; 3 rape cases have been reported; 4 cases of defilement have been reported and 3 domestic violence case.

Although studies have shown the prevalence of FGM practice in Ado-Ekiti, the Gender Unit has not handled any of such cases and therefore, has no record whatsoever on it.

However, the data, when compared to that of the hospital where survivors are referred to from the Gender Unit, had a significantly high level of inconsistency. The study established that the Gender Unit at the State-CID solely handles all VAW cases and as such, sub-divisions that receive cases related to VAW are required to transfer them to the State-CID. However, an exception is made for domestic violence cases which can be handled by divisions. When a case is reported at the Gender Unit, an investigation is initiated immediately after taking down signed statements; a duplicate of the case file will be filled to the Department of Public Prosecution, wherewith the case will be charged to court.

The third objective wanted to determine the effectiveness and challenges encountered by the Gender Unit. The researcher sought information on the environment of the Gender Unit. According to the UN Women, the gender desk should serve as a focal point where GBV and SGBV cases are reported. It should respond to any distress call and therefore it should have a hotline, it should have adequate rooms for receiving the victims, promoting procedures and protocols on investigations, interviews and enforcing protective orders. In establishing if the Gender Unit environment met the needs of the VAW survivors, the researcher ascertained the amount of time the survivors waited before they were served at the gender unit, if the gender unit officers were trained on legal tools used to address GBV and on emerging gender issues, if the gender unit had adequate rooms to ensure privacy when reporting the case and if the Gender Unit had a safe-room where the survivors could stay as a place of safety.

This study suggests that the Gender Unit environment is not conducive for VAW cases. The survivor's privacy is not upheld since the reporting is done at the general front desk before being referred to the gender unit office or interview room. The Gender Unit has only one room that is regularly available and has poor infrastructure. Most of the survivors have to wait for a long waiting time before being attended to due to the fact that the Gender Unit is understaffed.

Structural Functionalists see society as an interrelated system in which each group or social institution plays a part in helping the system to operate. The Nigerian Police Force as a structure in the criminal justice system is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring

security and enforcing the Law. The NPF within itself has a structure that is broken down into various departments to carry out these said responsibilities. The Gender Unit is also seen as a structure under the Criminal Investigation Department. The researcher sought to find out how the gender unit contributes towards the integration or inversely disintegration of the criminal justice system by either fulfilling or failing to fulfil the needs of the system. The study found that there have been challenges that hindered the effectiveness of the gender unit thereby making it dysfunctional. The following challenges were highlighted by the key informants and also observed by the researcher: lack of funds to cater for logistics and stationeries, amongst others; inadequate staff in the Gender Unit; inadequate privacy for survivors; poor documentation; lack of a special hotline for the Gender Unit in order to foster rapid response to reports. A long waiting time before survivors are attended to was also highlighted as one of the challenges.

Conclusion

The findings of the study show that though the Gender Unit has been making efforts in responding swiftly to VAW cases, it however falls short of some expectations. The Gender Unit environment is not conducive for the survivors as it has no privacy and does not have the basic infrastructure. The gender unit has numerous challenges as captioned above. Notwithstanding, the study shows that there has been an increase in the number of VAW cases reported as a result of the increased confidence the general public has in the Force Gender Unit. The support gotten from NGOs and other agencies is one that has also helped in improving the efforts of the Gender Unit.

The theory of structural functionalism establishes the existence of a social structure within a system and different aspect of social structure and social organization tend to be functionally related to one another, so that what happens in one part of society affects and is shaped by what happens in others. From the above findings, the Gender Unit might not be effective on its own. The approach should be holistic and involve all actors. The response should include referring the individual survivors for specialized services such as psycho-social support, medical attention, and legal representation among others. Members of community and local system should also be sensitized for effective

prevention of VAW. At the society level, the police should enforce the legal instruments and charge the perpetrators. With the networking of all these actors, VAW would be effectively addressed.

State services, particularly the criminal justice system, reproduce the structural inequalities and violence that enable violence against women. While the importance of these services for the immediate wellbeing and safety of many women must not be ignored, neither must their gaps, exclusions, and inadequacies. Where state services do not address the structures of violence that support individual expressions of violence, they become complicit in these structures through that omission.

Recommendations

The study came up with the following recommendations to make the Gender Unit more effective:

- i). An additional staff in the Gender Unit that will be available at all times to attend to walk-in survivors. The staff will not be assigned duties that require him/her to leave the premises. The staff should also have access to the interview room at all times so victims can be taken there if there is a need for privacy.
- ii). There should be a separate vehicle assigned to the Gender Unit to ease mobility and foster effectiveness.
- iii). Officers should be trained on proper documentation and filing of cases.
- iv). The Gender Unit should have the basic office requirements such as computers, stationery and decent office furniture.
- v). The Gender Unit officers should be trained on the needed skills in addressing VAW and on the legal tools used in fighting VAW such as the GBV Prohibition Law (2019).
- vi). Also, the need to sensitize other officers at the State-CID is necessary because they might be the first point of contacts to the survivors and they need to know the sensitivity of VAW cases as well as the need to handle them discretely. The need

to be empathetic can also not be overemphasized and this is something that is required of the officers.

- vii). To ensure a prompt action, a 24-hour toll-free line should be developed to report the VAW cases.
- viii). There is need for a harmonized synergy between the Gender Unit and all other relevant stakeholders/agencies. This way, the unit can refer the individual survivors for specialized services such as psycho-social support, medical attention, and legal representation among others.
- ix). There is also the need for further research across all states in Nigeria on the assessment of the response of NPF gender unit to VAW cases.

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