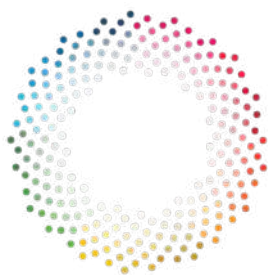




16 FACTS ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NIGERIA

For the 16 Days of Activism.



**Spotlight
Initiative**

*To eliminate violence
against women and girls*

Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations:



Foreword

Violence Against Women and Girls is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in the world. One in three women experience physical, sexual or intimate-partner violence; are victims of trafficking, or are subject to violent social norms.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a dramatic increase in reported cases of violence against women and girls. With up to 18 million female learners affected by school closures and concerted efforts to end child marriage becoming hampered by the lockdowns. Anecdotal reports show that domestic abuse and rape increased by 149% during the lockdown period as well as an increase in the number of girls subjected to FGM.

This is a collection of 16 advocacy briefs, highlighting facts, context and recommendations about violence against women and girls in Nigeria. It is sponsored by the Spotlight Initiative, the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

It recognizes the positive developments, particularly in awareness-raising and social advocacy, increased disclosure of rape and assault, and notable improvement in services. Still, a lot more needs to be done to offset the cumulative effects of decades of systemic abuse and violations of women and children.

Our appreciation goes to the courageous survivors, foot soldiers and state actors who have shared their stories and experiences in the fight to end violence against women and girls.



.....
Dame Pauline Tallen
Honourable Minister of Women Affairs



.....
Ms Samuela Isopi
Ambassador of the European Union and ECOWAS



.....
Mr. Matthias Schmale
UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator
On behalf of UNICEF, UNWOMEN, UNESCO, UNDP and UNFPA

22nd November, 2022

Preface

We live in very challenging times for women and girls. For several women and girls in Nigeria, the home is not a safe place; schools could be safer, and violence in all forms remains widespread.

In this compilation of facts about violence against women and girls in Nigeria, we are not only confronted with the evidence of worrying trends, but UNICEF is demonstrating that violence in all forms is preventable.

We salute the courage and tenacity of all the Change Makers mentioned, who are increasingly raising their voices and demanding action. We must all join hands to act and ensure we leave no women or girls behind.

Governments, development actors, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media, and the entire UN system must join forces to end all forms of violence. We must adopt adequate laws and legislation, address harmful gender norms, provide comprehensive services and access to justice and empower girls with education and skills.

As you read through the pages and are empowered with the knowledge to act, we invite you to say more and do more to stop violence against women and girls in Nigeria.



Cristian Munduate

UNICEF Nigeria Country Representative

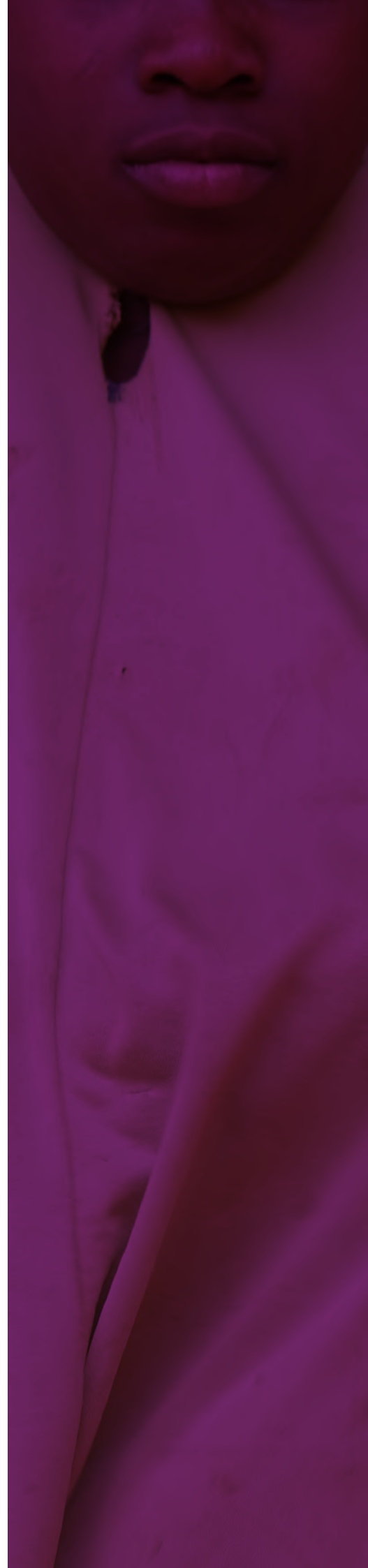
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Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is used to describe all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. This encompasses a range of acts, including unwanted completed sex acts (e.g., rape), attempted non- consensual sex acts (e.g., unwanted completed or attempted sex), abusive sexual contact (e.g., unwanted touching), and pressured sex (such as through threats or tricks), by any person regardless of their relationship to the person experiencing the violence, in any setting including but not limited to home and work. This also includes: the inducement or coercion of a person, including a child, to engage in any unlawful or psychologically harmful sexual activity; the exploitative use in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; and the exploitative use in pornographic performances and materials.

Sexual violence has a profound impact on physical and mental health. As well as causing physical injury, it is associated with an increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems, with both immediate and long-term consequences. Its impact on mental health can be as serious as its physical impact and may be even more long lasting. Deaths following sexual violence may be as a result of suicide, HIV infection or murder – the latter occurring either during a sexual assault or subsequently, as a killing of “honour.” Sexual violence can also profoundly affect the social wellbeing of victims; individuals may be stigmatized and ostracized by their families and others as a consequence.

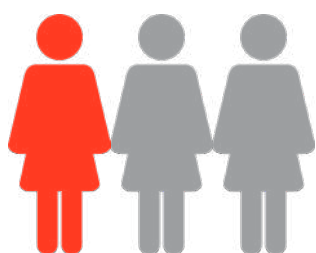


Fact No. 1

Physical violence can happen anytime anywhere to any woman or girl

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Almost one in three (31%) women aged 15- 49 have experienced physical violence in Nigeria.¹



Physical violence remains largely underreported partly because of the stigma that is attached to it and because social norms allow it to go unpunished. Physical assault on women and girls is widespread. Situations of humanitarian crises and displacement may exacerbate existing violence, such as by intimate partners, as well as non-partner physical violence, and may also lead to new forms of violence against women. Physical violence cuts across cultures, levels of education, income, religion and ethnicity. Yet, physical violence remains widely underreported due to societal pressure to keep silent, victim-blaming, prevailing stigma and internalized acceptance of violence.

Break The Silence!

1. **Speak-up** if you have experienced any form of violence.
2. **Listen** if someone tells you about having experienced any form of violence.
3. **Report** to the authorities so that perpetrators, whoever they are, do not go unpunished.
4. **Support** survivors of physical violence by telling them that you believe them when they disclose, including children. Holding a space of safety for them will help them in their healing process.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Violence against women is preventable. The protection of women and girls starts with having an adequate legal framework that ensures gender equality and tackles any form of violence they may experience.

I. Governors are to ensure the passage and implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law across all States.

II. The country needs to adopt a National strategy for the prevention of violence against women and girls to support effective implementation of existing laws.

III. Communication campaigns are to be developed at community levels and in all institutions to raise awareness of the issue, share reporting and support mechanisms that exist and promote a culture that does not tolerate any form of violence against women and girls.

¹ NDHS 2018

Precious playing games with her siblings in the farmyard outside her home. School has helped create a pathway for recovery for Precious but her parents say that more support is needed to help her recover. Two years of awaiting justice for the rapist has been hard and the family only manages with legal support to help them keep pushing the case in the courts.



CHANGE MAKER



LAGOS: Lola leads the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT). Lola and her team are on the frontline of the crisis in Nigeria working to support survivors of abuse and their families, even during the COVID pandemic. Lola is a lawyer and she advises mothers on how to navigate the system to seek justice and support for them and their children. Lola says that the majority of cases involve a trusted family member or community leader. She says she has many cases where the preacher, family friend or the uncle is the abuser. Lola and her team are forced to deliver services from a cramped container office that is always full of women seeking support. “It’s so difficult,” Lola says. “A child that is supposed to be protected is being abused by the so-called person that is supposed to protect them.” Lola says it was below the surface before but now the cases are coming out. “With cases of incest, it was a taboo,” Lola says. “But now you are having more reports of incest coming up and it is not because it just started happening, it was happening before but people were not speaking up.”

Fact No. 2

Parents, watch out! Children are particularly at risk

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

One in four girls, including very young ones, experience sexual violence.²

Boys are also affected: one in ten boys experience sexual abuse.



Violence starts at a young age. Over half of children first experienced physical violence between the ages of 6 and 11 years, while approximately 1 in 10 children's first experience is under the age of 5 years. Perpetrators are overwhelmingly people the children know: they are most likely to experience sexual violence in the perpetrator's home, followed by their own home, at school, at someone else's home and on a road. Children are not speaking out, seeking or receiving services – they are more likely to tell a friend or relative than a service provider or authority figure.

If You See Something, Say Something!

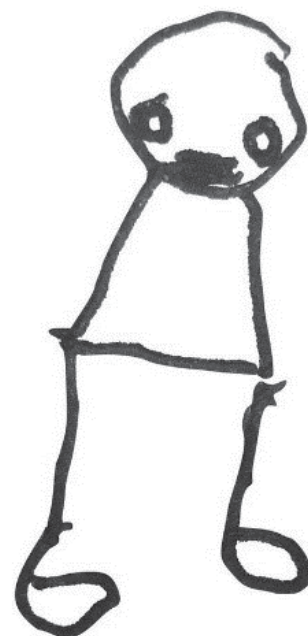
WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Violence against children, and particularly girls needs to be prioritized:

- I. Governors are to support the passage of the Child Rights Act across all States.
- II. The country needs to scale up child protection service delivery across sectors and fast track cases of child abuse.
- III. Communities, especially men and boys, are to be engaged on issues related to violence against children.
- IV. Evidence on sexual violence needs to be generated for policy, programming and advocacy.

² National Population Commission, 2014, Violence against Children Survey

*Self-portrait by Aisha from Sokoto.
She's only 5 and she was raped by a
friend of the family. The family decided
not to press charges*



CHANGE MAKER



Flora leads the child protection network in Ebonyi state. She gets calls all the time about cases of child rape and other forms of violence against girls. In a very rural state, it's not easy for her to reach remote villages when cases are reported.

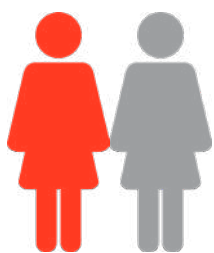
Her department is under resourced and she doesn't have a vehicle to respond as quickly as she'd like. The police are using better techniques to protect the child as they investigate, but Flora says it's important for her team to get to the village and provide extra support for the children.

Fact No. 3

For many women and girls, home is not a safe place

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Half of girl child who experienced sexual violence, experienced it at home.³



Data indicates that incest is widespread in Nigeria, which makes the reporting and the prosecution of perpetrators particularly challenging especially if they also happen to be the family's breadwinner. Incest is human sexual activity between family members or close relatives. This typically includes sexual activity between people in consanguinity, and sometimes those related by affinity, adoption, or lineage.

Domestic violence is also high with almost two out of every ten married women and girls (16 percent) reporting experiencing physical or sexual violence at the hands of their spouses or partners at some point during their lives. Marital rape or spousal rape is the act of sexual intercourse with

one's spouse without the spouse's consent. Marital rape is considered a form of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Families Matter!

Intimate partner violence has been associated with higher rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity (through, for example diarrheal disease or malnutrition and lower immunization rates). In addition, Children who grow up in families where there is violence may suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances. These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life.

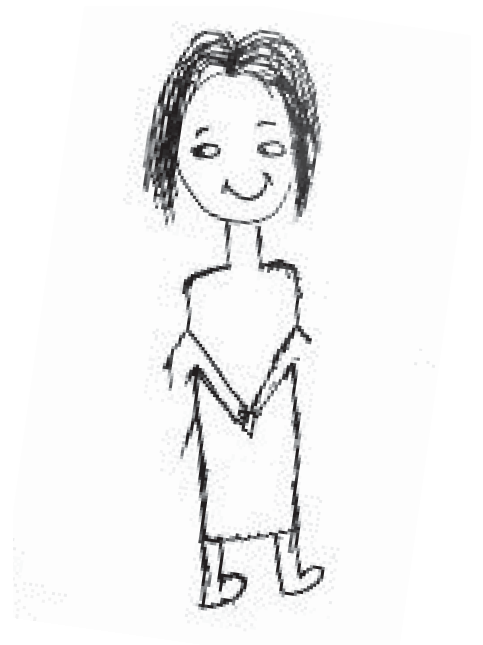
WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Family violence needs to be addressed so that home can be a place to relax, play and enjoy spending time with loved ones. It is critical to:

- I. Develop domestic abuse policy framework to safeguard survivors (and their children)
- II. Improve multi-agency risk assessment (screening for domestic violence in public facilities that attend to women and children for early detection of survivors and perpetrators) and support to survivors of domestic abuse to generate links with other public protection arrangements in relation to children and vulnerable adults.
- III. Support the strengthening of grassroots organizations that are survivors-centered working to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence.

³ National Population Commission, 2014, Violence against Children Survey

Ndidi was raped by her father when she was 8 years old. She told her mother but her mother did nothing because of fear and dependence on the father. After four years of horrific abuse, Ndidi escaped and got help. She lives in a shelter home for girls who have been through similar trauma. Ndidi wants to be a gospel singer.



CHANGE MAKER



Rashidat Mohammed is a Human Rights Lawyer with a special interest in promoting the rights of women and children. She provides pro-Bono legal services for women and girls who have experienced violence in northwest Nigeria. She also represents vulnerable men and families who can't afford a lawyer and are struggling to get justice in the Nigerian legal system.

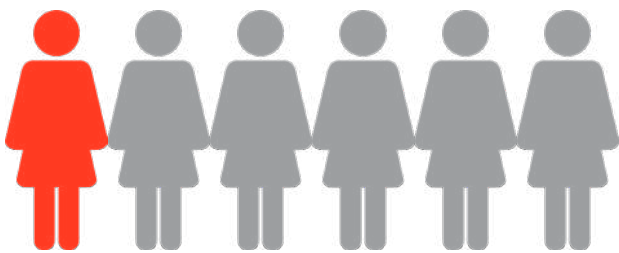
As a passionate lawyer on human rights issues, she is well known in Sokoto for her outspoken defence of women and girls and her fierce prosecution of rapists and pedophiles. She is the first and only woman to open her own law firm within Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara States. In addition to her round the clock work as a lawyer and activist, Rashidat is also a single mother who is the sole caregiver to her 3 children.

Fact No. 4

Schools can be safer!

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

1 in 6 girls who are sexually abused experienced it at school.⁴



The 2nd most common location where girls report having experienced sexual abuse is the schools. The VACS 2014 survey asked females and males aged 18-24 years whether they had been asked to exchange sex for money, food, gifts, or favours prior to age 18.

The survey found that 8 percent of young women and 1 percent of young men had experienced this. The study also found low levels of reporting cases of violence with only 4% of cases of sexual violence being reported. Common perpetrators of all types of violence are peers and classmates (VACS, 2014). Children feel most unsafe walking to and from school.

School enrollment should be a protective factor rather than a risk factor.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Education is key to gender equality. In light of Nigeria's high out of school rates, efforts must be made to increase school retention for girls and boys:

I. The recent National policy on safety, security and violence free-schools and its implementing guidelines should be urgently applied in school settings. This includes teachers' mandatory reporting of cases of violence, safety of physical spaces (toilets, fences, security, etc.) and close collaboration of schools with other sectors such as social, legal and health services.

II. Safety to and from schools is addressed by working with transport operators, school buses, and community vigilante groups

III. SUBEB and School Management Committees to prioritize safety in schools especially for the girl child through school-based violence prevention interventions.

⁴ National Population Commission, 2014, Violence against Children Survey

Imbiana was on her way home from school when she fell asleep on the minibus and woke up at the end of the line in a neighborhood she didn't know. In a panic, she tried to reach her mum and a woman paid for her to get a motorbike home. When Imbiana walked in the door, her mother burned her stomach with the side of a hot knife. Her injury was spotted at school and she was taken into state care. She says her mother has apologised but Imbiana doesn't want to go home. She's in school and studying to be a doctor.



CHANGE MAKER



Kiki Mordi is an Emmy nominated investigative journalist, filmmaker and media entrepreneur. She led the investigation into the culture of sexual harassment in Nigerian and Ghanaian universities in BBC's Emmy nominated investigative documentary titled "Sex For Grades".

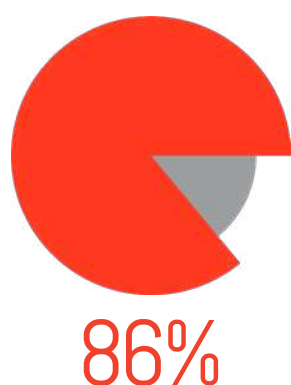
This investigation exposed lecturers leveraging their position of authority to solicit for sex or relationships with students including minors. Since then a bill to criminalize sex for marks has passed its 3rd reading at the Nigerian Senate and will soon become a law. She is also the founder of "Document Women", a digital media platform dedicated to battling the erasure of women.

Fact No. 5

Sexual assault on women and girls is a public health issue

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

86% of people presenting for medical attention due to sexual assault in health care facilities are women and girls.



Sexual assault referral centres - commonly known as SARCs - provide crucial services for survivors of sexual violence. According to the 2021 SARC incident reporting, most cases of sexual offences are committed against females (88 per cent), and young people under 18 years old (80 per cent), while 60 per cent of rape survivors in Nigeria are children 0-14yrs.

Violence negatively affects women and children's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings. The health sector has an important role to play in providing comprehensive health care to women and girls subjected to violence, and as an entry point for referring women to other support services they may need.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

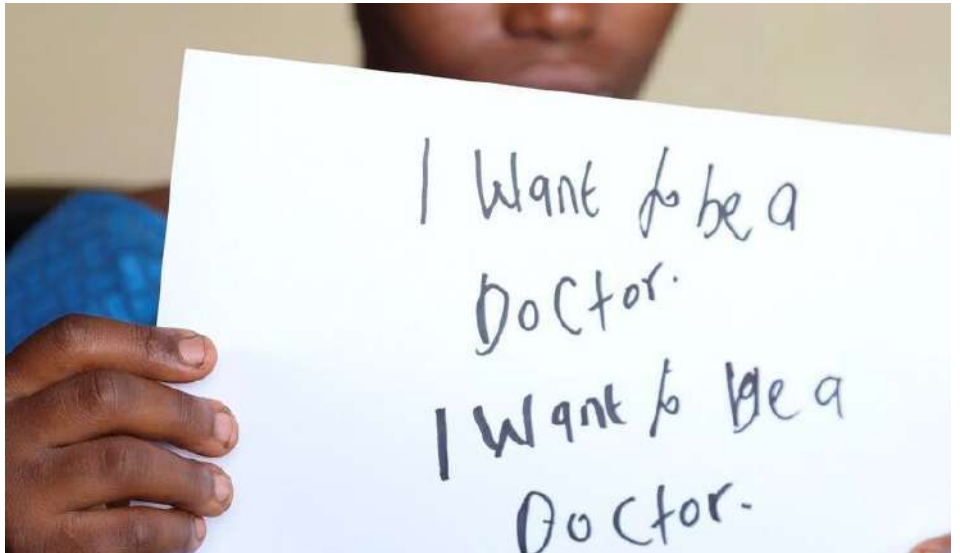
All survivors of violence need to be able to access comprehensive, acceptable, quality services that are age-appropriate, gender responsive, user-friendly and affordable

I. Develop a plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children; include coverage of medical care for survivors

II. Provide comprehensive services, sensitize and train health care providers in responding to the needs of survivors holistically and empathetically with strong referral mechanisms that include forensic, medical, psychological, legal and aftercare services.

III. Strengthen and expand sexual assault referral centers across the country building on existing structures and involving grassroots organizations that are working on responding to violence against women and girls for appropriate care and support.

Miracle was 14 when she was raped by a man in her neighborhood in Lagos. He threatened her to keep quiet but when she became pregnant, she spoke out and others in her class came forward and reported him for abuse. Miracle publicly denounced her rapist on the street before he went to prison. She wants to go back to school and become a doctor.



CHANGE MAKER



Itoro runs the Mirabel rape crisis center in Lagos. For ten years the center has been an outpost of support for victims of rape in a city where government services struggle to cope with the scale of the needs. Itoro visited the rape crisis center in Manchester in the UK almost 20 years ago, which informed the establishment of the Mirabel Center.

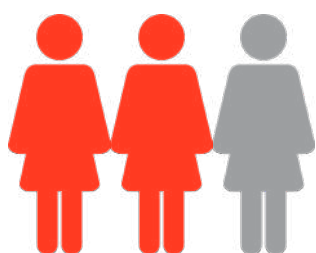
She returned to Nigeria and battled the patriarchal bureaucracy for a decade before she realized her dream of helping rape survivors in her own country. Mirabel helps traumatized girls and their families with every part of the recovery, from medical exams to legal advice.

Fact No. 6

Violence is pervasive and unpredictable

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

2 in 3 women and girls experience violence by their husbands and boy friends



The relationship between women's experience of violence and education is not linear and inversely proportional as in many other countries. While typically more educated women tend to suffer lower levels of intimate partner violence this is not the case in Nigeria. A study on Intimate partner violence shows

- 25% prevalence in women with basic primary education,
- 23% prevalence in women with secondary education,
- 13% prevalence in women with tertiary education
- And only 9% prevalence in women with NO education

Intimate Partner Violence is recorded to be higher among women in the middle wealth quintile (20%).

There's Always a Good Reason!

Most common circumstances that result in violence against women include: when food is burnt, when women argue with the spouse, when women go out without informing the spouse, when children are neglected and when women refuse to have sex with the husband.

Never married women experience physical violence most often from their mother/stepmother (1 in 3) and from their father/stepfather (1 in 4).

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Harmful gender norms are the foundations for violence against women and girls. Working on the prevention of violence requires a holistic approach and the engagement of all actors through:

- I. Strengthening community support initiatives to address violence against women and girls.
- II. Engaging traditional rulers and religious leaders as they play a pivotal role as community gatekeepers and drivers of social change because of their moral authority and influence.
- III. Developing awareness campaigns to address negative gender norms and stereotypes, and share information on laws, policies, reporting and support mechanisms that exist.

CHANGE MAKER



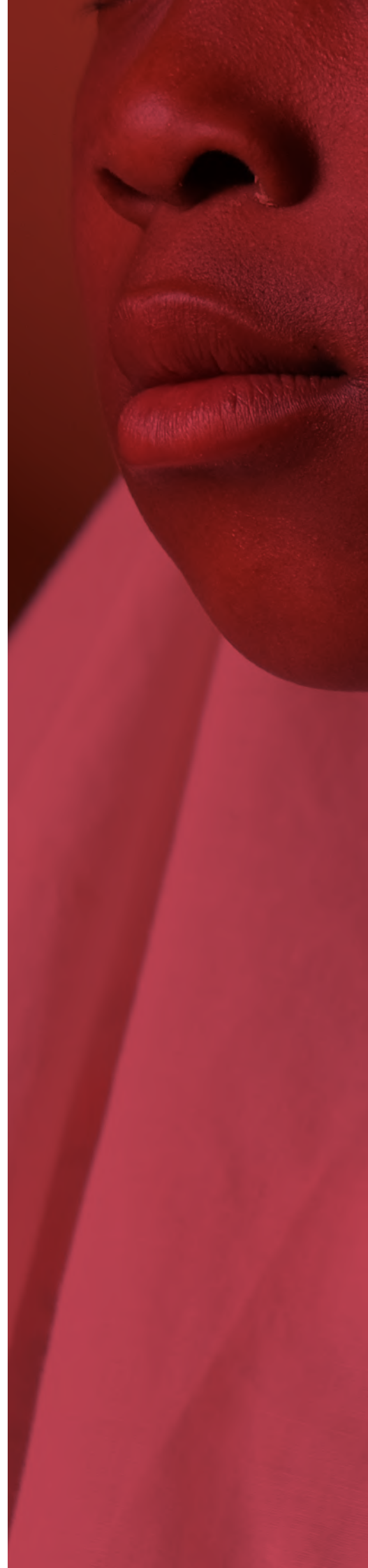
Josephine set up Project Alert more than 20 years ago in Lagos. She says at the time, very few people were talking about rape and even fewer were taking action. She's been a pioneer on the issue and is deeply hearted by the progress and proliferation of allies.

Josephine's organization runs a safe house for women and helps them get on their feet. Despite progress in talking about violence, patriarchal norms mean that women who report their husbands for violence or family members for rape can face reprisals and even ostracization from their communities.

Physical Violence

Physical violence is defined as the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury or harm regardless of the relationship to the child experiencing the violence, in any setting. This includes punching (hitting with a fist), kicking, whipping, beating with an object, choking, smothering, trying to drown, burning intentionally, or using or threatening to use a gun, knife or other weapon, regardless of whether or not it resulted in obvious physical or mental injury.

It is not focused on acts of discipline, although many of those perpetrating the violence may be doing so in the name of 'discipline'.



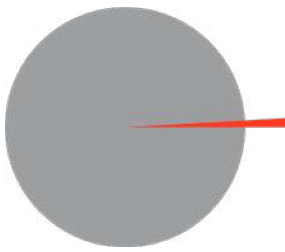


Fact No. 7

Offenders go unpunished

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

0.9% of perpetrators of sexual assault are brought to trial, almost none of them are convicted.



0.9%

Many cases of violence are not reported and amongst those that are reported most cases are settled out of court. Nearly half (45%) of women and girls (15-49 years) facing physical or sexual violence do not tell anyone about their experience of violence - only one third (31%) seek help, while only 5% of children below 18 years who experienced physical violence sought for help.

An analysis of the SARC data indicates that out of the 14,790 survivors of sexual assault supported since 2017, only 483 arrests were made, 144 cases were charged to court and only 4 convictions took place. 189 cases were settled outside the legal system. This is aggravated by a generalized lack of trust of citizens, particularly women, in the criminal justice system to enforce the existing laws, lack of awareness of laws and knowledge

of rights, amidst a context dominated by social norms that legitimate the perpetration of abuse, stigma and underreporting. This in turn results in the impunity of perpetrators, re-victimization of survivors and the reproduction of the cycle of violence.

Tackling Impunity!

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) created a 'sex offenders' online register with full identity of convicted felons (nsod.naptip.gov.ng) as part of its mandate to administer the provisions of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. The main thrust of the law is to eliminate violence in private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

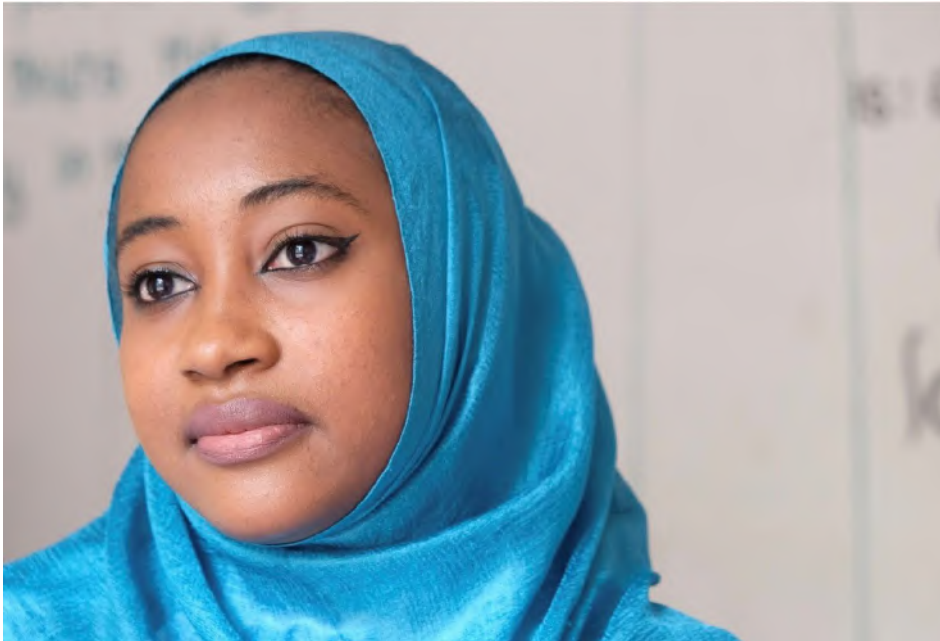
Failure to prosecute rights offenders' generates impunity which in turn fuels cycles of violence. It is imperative to:

- I. Establish accountability mechanisms, standing operating procedures and safeguards principles to fast track cases of sexual assault on women and children
- II. Increase and ensure budgetary allocation and timely release of funds to address violence against women and girls to key services, especially the police
- III. Strengthen interagency coordination and collaboration as a way to strengthen Legal Advice and Representation to survivors of sexual assault.



Phoebe, 13, in school in FCT.

CHANGE MAKER



Khadijah is a lawyer and activist who works to help survivors of violence seek justice. Low-literacy, poverty and entrenched distrust of authorities make it hard for victims of violence to know where to start. Khadijah helps families navigate the confusing legal system and ensures they turn up to give testimony, building the case so more rapists are prosecuted.



Emotional Violence

Emotional violence is defined as a pattern of verbal behavior over time or an isolated incident that is not developmentally appropriate and supportive and that has a high probability of damaging a person's mental health, or his physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes being ridiculed or put down by a parent, adult caregiver or adult relative, or being told by them that they were unloved or did not deserve to be loved, that they wished they were dead or had never been born.

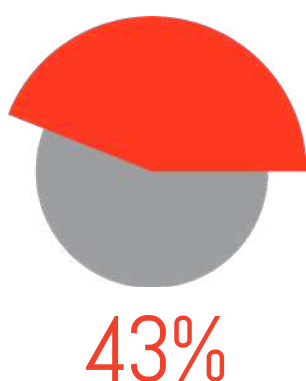


Fact No. 8

Nigeria has the highest number of child brides worldwide

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Nearly half of girls (43%) get married before their 18th birthday while one in five girls is married by the age of 15.



Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa (23 million girls and women married as children), and carries the third largest burden of child brides globally (3.3M), after India (26.6M) and Bangladesh (3.9M). At least 43% of girls in Nigeria are married before their 18th birthday, while 18.5% are married before they turned 15 so almost 1 in 5 girls.

In the North West of the country, almost one in two girls (46%) is married by the age of 15. Child marriage is a key driver of challenges throughout northern Nigeria, leading to school drop-out and adolescent

pregnancy which is also linked to high maternal mortality and malnutrition, among other issues. Child marriage is a leading cause of obstetric fistula which affects about 20,000 women and girls every year. In addition, child brides are 50% more likely to experience physical or sexual violence by their partners.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

I. Engage religious and community leaders on gender inequitable social norms and behavior change to prevent sexual violence, child marriage, FGM and promote access to services for survivors.

II. Renew and implement a National Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage in Nigeria to support multi-sectoral interventions through the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

III. Develop programs to support married girls and promote access to formal education.

¹ NDHS 2018

Aisha is 13 years old. She went to a traditional healer in her village to get his help. She wanted him to make a potion so she could find a husband. After a long consultation, he told her she needed his sperm to make the formula more potent. He raped her and threatened her not to tell anyone. Now she's 8 months pregnant. She dropped out of school and her parents have pleaded with the rapist for support. Reluctantly he's agreed that if the baby is healthy, he'll take her as another wife. Some rural communities distrust the police and try to settle cases of rape through village negotiation, but for Aisha this could result in having to marry her rapist or facing a lifetime of stigma, fear and uncertainty.



CHANGE MAKER



Kulu is the director of the ministry of women affairs in Sokoto state. She goes above and beyond to help girls who have been raped in their community. Families come to her and she uses her contacts to get them the right support; Sometimes it's legal advice, medical treatment or psychological counseling. Kulu says each case is different and she responds to what the girl needs.

Fact No. 9

Rate of teenage pregnancy is alarming

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

By the age of 16, one in five girls is either pregnant or has given birth.⁵



Nigeria has amongst the highest numbers of teenage pregnancies worldwide (rank 11).

An estimated 21% of women aged 15- 19 years have begun childbearing, of which 17% have had their first child, and a mere 2% of sexually active girls between 15 and 19 use contraceptives. The statistics reveal a direct relationship between level of education and rate of early pregnancies. The lowest literacy rates have the highest rates of early pregnancies. The explanation given is that the higher the level of education, the higher the level of contraceptive use and awareness about risks and complications associated with early pregnancy.

There is also a correlation between poverty levels and early pregnancies as teenagers in the lowest wealth quintile are 2 times more likely to begin childbearing than teenagers in the middle wealth quintile. Transactional sex which occurs when sex is exchanged directly or indirectly for material support, is common in contexts of extreme poverty but also in less deprived communities

and humanitarian settings. Adolescent girls are especially at risk of pursuing transactional sexual relationships typically with older men in positions of wealth, power or authority. Nationally representative data on transactional sex prevalence among Nigerian women is scarce though.

Other factors resulting in increased rates of pregnancies amongst young girls include rape and changes in societal values. The consequences are detrimental to the mothers and the babies: school drop-out, unwanted marriages, domestic violence, maternal death or medical complications such as premature labor and emotional distress and vaginal fistulas leading to the girls being incontinent and ostracized by society as all too often, surgery is not available or not done properly.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Addressing teenage pregnancy requires multi- stakeholders interventions such as:

- I. Convening Federal and State experts to develop unplanned pregnancy prevention policies
- II. Creating new programmes and services for teenagers and young adults, including positive parenting and knowledge of reproductive health.
- III. Integrating teen and unplanned pregnancy into existing maternal and welfare programmes for youth and adults to scale up support and evidence through data collection.
- IV. Improved access to contraceptives and other reproductive health services to adolescents and young adults.

⁵ DHS2018

Rahama is 13 years old and the mother of a 1 year old boy. She was raped by a neighbor who had powerful friends. She was terrified he would kill her if she told anyone but when her family found out she was pregnant they reported the crime to the police. They were encouraged to settle the case and initially they had no success seeking justice. A pro bono lawyer took on Rahama's case and finally got the rapist arrested and behind bars. Rahama says she doesn't like her baby as it reminds her of what happened. She wants to go back to school and become a lawyer.



CHANGE MAKER



Buky leads a non-profit organization 'education as a vaccine'. While the genius of the development organization was to combat HIV and AIDS, Buky says the name is equally relevant when talking about violence against girls in Nigeria.

Buky studied in the US and started her career there but felt compelled to return home and stand up for girls in her home country. She oversees projects that work to reduce violence against girls by building support and awareness in communities across the country.

Fact No. 10

Nigeria has the highest numbers of female genital mutilation

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Nearly one in six Nigerian women (15%) has been circumcised in Nigeria.

Nigeria accounts for the third-highest number of women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM).



The World Health Organisation defines female genital mutilation as “all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reasons.” The practice is deeply rooted and enshrined in taboos with the culture of silence and secrecy making it persistent.

Each community has its own name for it, sometime shared with male circumcision. FGM is always traumatic with immediate complications including excruciating pain, shock, urine

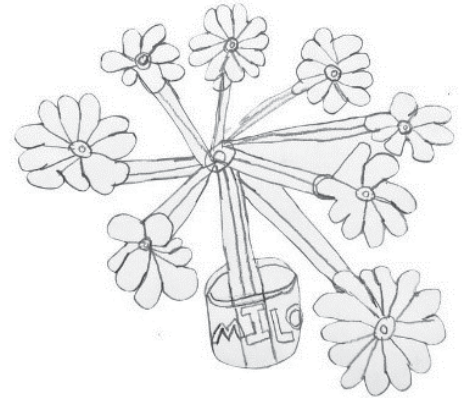
retention, injury and can lead to other complications such as septicaemia, infertility, obstructed labour, and death. Female circumcision, or female genital mutilation (FGM) remains widespread in Nigeria: 15% of women aged 15-49 years have undergone the procedure (MICS 2016 -2017). While there is a significant decrease of the practice compared to ten years ago (27% in 2011), the prevalence among girls aged 0-14 years remains worryingly high (8%).

FGM is a Human Rights Violation!

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

FGM is an old age practice (tradition) performed to promote chastity and increase girls’ marriageability. It requires:

- I. Creating a movement to end FGM led by young girls and boys, lactating mothers and influential community leaders.
- II. Scaling deep (expanded coverage), promotion and facilitation of localized and sustainable solutions, through the operationalization of community owned FGM Elimination Action Plans.
- III. Strengthening evidence and data collection to increase policy, programming and advocacy in States where the practice is high.



Drawing of flowers in a Milo pot by girls at the TKTKTK School in Abuja.

CHANGE MAKER



Philomina is a part of an activist group that is working to end female genital mutilation in Ebonyi State. The women patiently sit with male community leaders and explain the long-term health impacts women suffer as a result of ‘cutting’. They’re starting to change attitudes by getting leaders to speak out and stand with them against this violence.

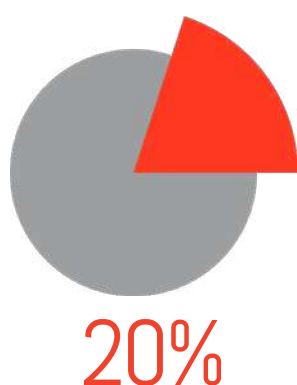
She and her fellow members say that birth control is a critical part of reducing violence against girls, so families aren’t over stretched trying to look after too many children. Philomina says that violence against girls will stop when women are valued and included in community leadership roles.

Fact No. 11

It's a matter of life and death

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Nigeria is the country where nearly 20% of all global maternal deaths happen⁶ while only one in ten women solely decide on their healthcare.



Although maternal mortality is preventable, Nigeria has one of the highest number of deaths related to child births with 512/100,000 live births (NDHS2018). Adolescent maternal mortality is among the top five causes of deaths in adolescents with 27% of girls 15-19 being affected.

The lack of trained health care attendants in births, cost and distance to antenatal clinics and the fact that many mothers still deliver at home (61%, DHS2018)

are among the main causes of the high maternal mortality rate in Nigeria. Accessing ante-natal care can prevent neonatal mortality and maternal anemia. Unfortunately, only over half of the pregnant women in Nigeria receive iron supplements and only 39% receive drugs to prevent malaria. It has further been revealed that a child whose mother dies at childbirth is three to ten times more likely to die before their second birthday.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Addressing maternal mortality requires

- I. Creating health awareness and health education programs in the rural community systems working closely with religious leaders, traditional birth attendants and community health volunteers to increase skill-based birth attendance.
- II. Improving quality of care provided in health care facilities (infrastructures to increase hygiene levels and technical/apptitude of health care workers to deliver services).
- III. Providing subsidized maternal health care services to women and girls in vulnerable situations.
- IV. Delay marriage and child birth through advocacy to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities associated with the early childbirth - e.g. VVF.

⁶ WHO2019

Gerard leads the parent teacher association in Ikorodu outside Lagos. He says violence against girls is out of control in their community and he is pushing the association to play an active part in the solution. Gerard says it's important for parents to play an active role in the schools and in their children's lives so they can protect them. But Gerard says that itinerant families, single mothers and the erosion of social norms is driving a spike in cases of rape. He encourages a dialogue with teachers and other parents to break the silence and take action on solutions.



CHANGE MAKER



Carolyn is an activist working to end violence against women and girls. She set up Girls Voices which empowers girls by teaching them how to make films about their lives and the issues that concern them. Carolyn says violence always comes through as the number one issue for girls around the country.

Her organization helps them produce short documentaries and then hosts screenings in communities where violence is endemic. She says the process breaks the silence and each screening is followed by dozens of girls coming forward, eager to share their story and join the movement.

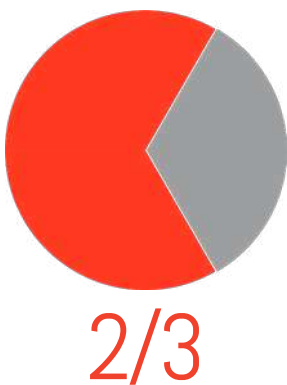
Fact No. 12

Women and girls bear the burden of illiteracy

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Two thirds of the 10.5 million children who are out of school are girls.⁷

38% of Nigerians are illiterate, out of them 60% are women and girls.⁸



Nearly one in four females and more than one in ten males never attended school. These low rates persist despite the Universal Basic Education Act 2004, which provides that basic education (primary - junior secondary) is free and compulsory, and offered to children aged 6-14. Unemployment disproportionately affects women. It is essential to prioritize investment in women and girls to ensure that they can contribute maximally to decision making, economic growth and development.

Facilitators in Adamawa State building Linkages between schools and Health Services.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Education is key to gender equality. In the light of Nigeria's high out of school rates, efforts must be made to increase school access and retention for girls and boys.

I. Generate discussions on illiteracy and provide free education in schools, colleges, and universities by the government to illiterate ones, especially the most vulnerable.

II. Create awareness about the importance of education and promote girls' school attendance.

III. Offer grants, subsidies, and scholarships to reduce the financial burden that parents and students bear in paying for education.

⁷ UBEC2015, ⁸ National Bureau of Statistics

Sahadatu Muhammed, a facilitator, providing basic literacy and numeracy training to women and girls at a Centre at the Shuware Garden City, Mubi North LGA, Adamawa state. The centre provides a safe space for non-literate (women and girls), both young and old in the community to participate in the EU/UN Accelerated Second Chance Education and Life Skills Programme.

I was once at the hospital and a woman came in with her child, but she was at the wrong ward because she could not read what was written on the card.

“Teaching is my passion”.



CHANGE MAKER



Hannah is 17. She's a youth ambassador for a grassroots organization that encourages girls to speak out about the violence they've experienced. Hannah says it's a process that requires patience and persistence. 'Most girls don't want to talk about it right away,' she says. 'I come back again and again and then slowly they start to open up and tell me about what they've been through.' Hannah gives them advice on who to speak to and refers cases to get support. It's a model of frontline services and it's led by youth who want to end violence in all its ramifications.

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Girls with intellectual disability aged 12-19 years are four times more likely to have experienced rape than their peers with no chronic disability.

4x

About 20% of women in Nigeria live with a disability, according to the World Disability Report of 2011. Activists say many of those women face stigma and suffer injustices because of their condition. Women and girls with disability are twice more likely to face domestic or sexual abuse than women and girls with no chronic disability. According to the center for citizens with disability, 87% deaf girls in Ibadan had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime.

Psychological violence is the most commonly reported (34%) form of violence against people with disability.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

I. Domesticate, fund and implement the National Policy on Disability, 2017, End the Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018.

II. Empower women and girls with disabilities, to promote their full inclusion in policies, programs and activities through advocacy, capacity development, awareness raising, networking, partnership, research and Information sharing.

III. Invest in evidence-based innovative interventions to address violence against women and girls living with disability.

IV. Provide adequate funding to the National Commission for Person with Disabilities to carry out its mandate under the Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018.

Zainab is 13 years old and has serious mental disabilities. A man in her neighborhood raped her and got her pregnant. She's unable to say who it is and her parents cannot pursue the case without a suspect. She's given birth to a healthy baby and the family are looking after it, but Zainab says she continues to be attacked by the man. The family raised the issue with police but they are told that no charges can be made until he's caught.



CHANGE MAKER



Asst Commandant Christy Umejiaku is the gender specialist with the civil defense in Sokoto state. She's one of a handful of officers who've received training on how to protect victims and put children's needs first when investigating rape cases.

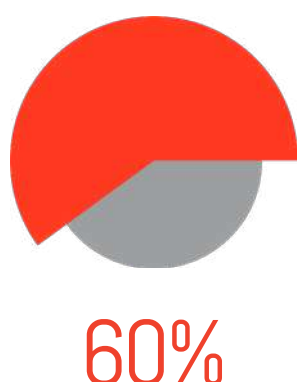
Christy says the training has helped her be more effective in her work and she now trains her fellow officers to share the knowledge and techniques. Civil defense is one of three law enforcement agencies that gets called when rapes occur in Sokoto, and it is seen by some as a way to seek justice while avoiding police bureaucracy.

Fact No. 14

The silence of women living with HIV

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

60% of the 3.5 million Nigerians living with HIV are women.



Nigeria has the second largest HIV epidemic in the world after South Africa. Women are particularly affected as they represent two-third of the those living with HIV in Nigeria. Most women learn their status when they are pregnant, although HIV testing is still not universal amongst pregnant women. Being HIV-positive means living in fear and in isolation and being subjected to various forms of abuse and violence especially when disclosing one's status as stigma remains high. UNAIDS estimates that around two-thirds of new HIV infections in West and Central Africa in 2019 occur in Nigeria.

Young people, especially girls, are particularly vulnerable due to lack of knowledge, limited access to sexual reproductive health services and intergenerational sex. HIV prevalence among formerly married women is as high as 5.9%. The prevalence among sex workers is also high (14.4%), but criminalizing laws mean that they are less likely to access adequate health services while being more vulnerable to abuse from law enforcers.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

I. Develop laws and policies that support people living with HIV, especially women and girls, and facilitate their access to services, particularly comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV services.

II. Establish mechanisms to monitor and report any forms of violence against people living with HIV, especially women and girls, including with law enforcement officials and health- and social-care providers.

III. Promote the inclusion and visibility of women and girls living with HIV to scale-up advocacy messages to tackle stigma, HIV prevention services, and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Bose runs the Women's Services Center in Lagos. For more than 15 years, she's been pushing against a culture of silence on rape and violence against women and girls. She's convinced that the conversations have to happen at the grassroots in the communities, instead of conferences with politicians. In addition to providing a safe place and immediate services for rape survivors, Bose's organization facilitates discussions with community leaders and helps change attitudes about the impact and urgency of the rape issue. She says it's a long and slow process but the results are satisfying and lasting. 'Leaders who were resistant have become our strongest allies in the effort to protect girls,' she says.



CHANGE MAKER



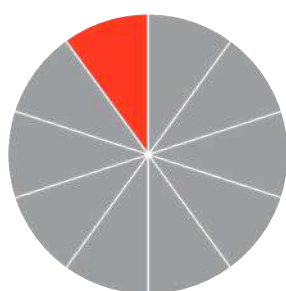
Abiola is the leader of a neighborhood watch program to keep girls safe in the Iwaya market in Lagos. It's a tough part of a big city and attacks against girls were common for a few years. Abiola says things are changing. 'Girls know they can come to me and I'll help them,' she says. 'But most of all, I get to know the girls and ensure they stay safe by avoiding dangerous places and bad situations.' Abiola says it's made a big difference for the girls, knowing there's someone looking out for them.

Fact No. 15

Orphans are particularly vulnerable

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

One in ten children is an orphan (meaning that one or both of their parents have died).



Nigeria has a sizable population of children who are orphans, who engage in child labor, and/or who do not attend school. 50% of children involved in child labour are girls. Many of the girls that engage in domestic labor are orphans, many do not attend school, and many are vulnerable to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Global evidence indicates that these children are particularly vulnerable to violence. Approximately 9 percent of children are orphans or are vulnerable owing to illnesses among adult household members. HIV has an indirect impact on children in Nigeria. Often they become the caregivers for

parents who are living with HIV. Normally, this responsibility lies with girls rather than boys and can contribute to the imbalance in schooling between the two genders in Nigeria. In general, female orphan and vulnerable girls are more likely than male orphans to engage in sexual activity before age 15 (16% and 5% respectively).

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

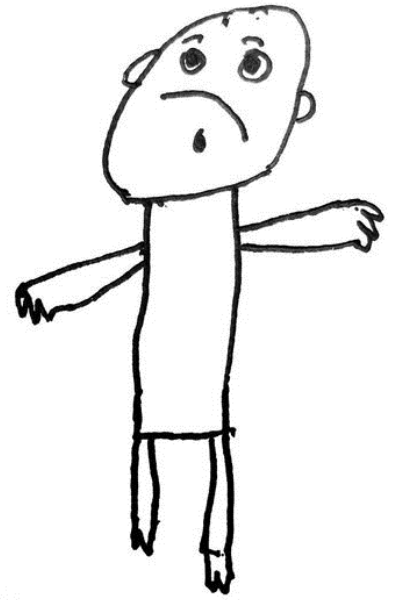
Engaging girls as domestic servants or in bonded labor is a form of violence and it is punishable by law

I. State governments need to promulgate, fund and implement child protection laws and policy actions that protect children without parental care, especially in relation to child trafficking and child labour.

II. Communities, traditional rulers and religious leaders need to be engaged in addressing the stigma related to orphanhood and the provision of alternative care to children in vulnerable situations.

III. Programmes that promote access to formal education and skills acquisition for vulnerable girls should be scaled up.

² National Population Commission, 2014, Violence against Children Survey



Self portrait by Shola at a shelter for vulnerable girls in Lagos. Shola is an orphan who was living on the street before she came to the home. The counsellors say she's not ready to talk about what happened to her.

CHANGE MAKER



Hassanah works for the government in Sokoto to end trafficking of children. She's a case worker who helps children who've been abducted and raped. Down the hall from her office is the shelter she helps run that provides refuge while the girls recover. She says it's deeply satisfying when she rescues girls from violent situations and gets them back into school.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure by a caregiver to provide for a ward (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.



Fact No. 16

COVID 19 lockdown led to a pandemic of violence against women

WHAT THE DATA SAYS

Domestic violence rose by 297% in one month.



Domestic violence rose from 60 reported cases in March 2020 to 238 reported cases in April 2020. An estimated 47 million women were unable to access contraceptives during the 6 months of lockdown, leading to a projected 7 million unintended pregnancies globally. During the lockdown, a decrease in access to GBV services coincided with an increase in proximity with perpetrators of violence.

The alarming numbers of the lockdown period led to an unprecedented collaboration between Government and development partners and the roll out of a centralized data system.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- I. The inter-ministerial committee must explore the use of alternative digital platforms for reporting of cases including use of toll-free hotlines.
- II. Stakeholders must adopt online engagements, including virtual trainings and explore the possibility of virtual court options.
- III. Support for community surveillance structures to identify and refer cases of violence at the community level need to be scaled up.

Ibrahim is from a small village outside Sokoto. His 12-year-old daughter Fatima was raped by a neighbor at the local market last year. When he found out, he reported it to the local authorities and the man was arrested. There was a meeting of community leaders to discuss the case and Ibrahim says he felt pressured to settle out of court and he dropped the charges. Ibrahim says he regrets that there was no justice for his daughter but he's relieved that she's recovered from the incident and is ready to continue with her studies. "I had to withdraw the case and to leave everything to God," Ibrahim says. "More than 10 times the community leaders came to me with the abuser

and pushed me to drop the charges. I had to choose between peace with my neighbors or justice for my daughter."

Even before the crisis, too many girls like Fatima experienced violence and were denied justice. The COVID 19 pandemic has made it harder for families like Ibrahim's to access the support they need. Settling a case in the community or making a deal with the abuser does not bring the best outcome for the survivors. For Ibrahim and Fatima, the wounds have begun to heal but the pain remains, and for many girls in Nigeria, the nightmare is ongoing.



CHANGE MAKER



Doctor Chidi works at the public hospital in Ezaa South in Ebonyi state. He treats several victims of child rape every month and he says the numbers have been rising. While part of it is better awareness, he thinks there are also more rapes happening. He says the medical report is an essential piece of evidence to help prosecutors get convictions and he's meticulous in getting the forms right, as one omission could derail the case. He's often called to testify in rape trials and he's frustrated by defense attorneys questioning his reports. Doctor Chidi says the medical evidence is impartial and if recorded properly, is undeniable and in most cases corroborate the testimony of the survivor.

FACTS which exacerbate the situation

Women are under-represented in decision making processes

Women's involvement in decision making has remained stagnant since 1999 with about 20% female Ministers and Special Advisers, 7% female Federal parliamentarians, 3% female Local Government Chairpersons, 3% females State Houses of Assembly members, 4 female Deputy Governors and no female State Governor.

This unequal power dynamic leads to women and girls having less access to resources and opportunities. Our current gender norms encourage women's absence at the decision-making level and endorses unequal power distribution in favor of men and boys

Greater efforts are required to increase political participation of women, amongst others through support for affirmative quotas and by placing women as candidates in key electoral institutions and political parties:

I. A gender equality code of conduct must be introduced for political parties mandating them to field a specified minimum number of women candidates.

II. Normalization of participation of women in decision-making process through strategic advocacy efforts.

III. Institutionalizing women's participation in other non-elective decision-making positions as a matter of Nation building and national development.

IV. Reform of the Constitution and Electoral Laws to promote and improve the participation of women in decision-making processes and institutions.

General Recommendations

Violence against women and girls in Nigeria is a pandemic sized problem which requires a similar sized response. It is time for all stakeholders to act and put the rights of women and girls at the forefront of policies, programmes and initiatives.

Laws and legislation

The protection of women and girls starts with having an adequate legal framework that ensures gender equality. Key in this regard is the adoption of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition act and the Child Right Act in all states across the country.

The ongoing constitutional review is a key opportunity to address gender equality, including affirmative action, political participation and amendment of provisions that undermine gender equality. Policies and legal frameworks require costed action plans and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure their implementation. A budget line to address violence against women and girls need to be included in national and state budgets, while national GBV accountability framework needs to be developed for tracking progress across agreed indicators.

Prevention of violence

Harmful gender norms are the foundation of violence against women and girls. Working on preventing violence requires a holistic approach, which includes empowerment of women and girls and addressing social norms through the engagement of all actors.

Environments that promote breaking the taboos attached to violence and allow parents and families to speak out and support their children to report experiences of violence are essential. Traditional rulers and religious leaders play a pivotal role as community gatekeepers and drivers of social change because of their moral authority and influence. Civil society organisations, women-led organisations, youth networks, male engagement organisations are at the forefront of driving social change. Advocacy campaigns that tackle harmful gender norms and gender stereotypes and empower people with information on existing laws are critical. Knowing one's rights and knowing how to act in case of exposure to violence is paramount to breaking the culture of silence and speaking out.

Services

All survivors of violence need to be able to access comprehensive, acceptable, quality services that are age-appropriate, gender responsive, user-friendly and affordable.

To effectively respond to cases of violence, inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms need to be operational at state level and include State Government, State Ministry of Women Affairs, State Ministry of Justice, and Zonal Police Forces at minima.

Hospitals should be equipped with the required resources to provide

free medical care for survivors, including free forensic medical reports, and psychological support. Shelters and Sexual Assault Referral Centres need to be available across the country.

Access to justice

This is a human right and is key to put an end to the culture of impunity. Police stations must be equipped with gender desks, be survivor friendly, and ensure investigation of all cases of violence, especially sexual violence.

Police stations need to have the financial means to investigate and arrest perpetrators, and need to be well staffed, well trained and well equipped to ensure respectful treatment of victims, evidence collection, and improvement of the quality of investigations. Forensic labs are to be set up in all geo-political zones of the country as a key tool for evidence collection.

A functional prosecution hub for cases of sexual violence against women and children, family courts and special courts on GBV need to be set up to ensure that cases of violence are fairly and promptly trialed. Additionally, the capacity of law and security institutions to deliver efficient judiciary services needs to be strengthened so that survivors receive the appropriate legal assistance and be protected against intimidation and reprisals.

Empowerment

Education is key to gender equality. In light of Nigeria's high out-of-school rates, efforts must be made to increase school access and retention for girls and boys. Unemployment disproportionately affects women, so investment in women and girls needs to be prioritized for them to contribute fully to strategic decision making, economic growth and national development.

Private sector engagement needs to be targeted for the provision of skills, work opportunities and banking services to women (especially in rural areas).

Achieving financial inclusion in the 21st century requires increased women and girls' access to digital skills training, basic literacy and numeracy. Political participation of women, by securing seats for them and by allowing them to stand as candidates in key electoral institutions and political parties is essential to ensuring the promotion of women and girls, especially the most vulnerable, in Nigeria.

About the Spotlight Initiative



The Spotlight Initiative (SI) is a global partnership between the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in support of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The Initiative was launched in September 2017 by the UN Secretary-General and the EU High Representative and Vice President. In Nigeria, the Initiative is coordinated by the Resident Coordinator Office and is led by UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO.

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