

# Violence Against Women

*A paper presented by Bebia patrica Bukie at the Public Education Activities of GPI in collaboration with Youthcare on December 7, 1996 at Mini-Theatre, Cultural Centre Board, Calabar.*

## DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

It has been observed by some scholars that violence is all actions having the implication of coercing a woman to act against her will. It covers all forms of harmful practices directed towards women in the society in connection to the UN definition of violence.

According to the Webster's encyclopedia, violence is a swift and intense force or a rough and injurious treatment against someone. It has also been defined as unjust or unwarranted exercise of force or power as against rights and laws.

In an attempt to define violence against women, it is any form of intimidating action or behaviour that tries to manipulate, or forcefully distort or transgress a women's right in the society. Infact, violence against women may take an overt or covert form. Implying that violence against women may not necessarily be an action, it may be an attitude or negative behaviour towards a woman which may infringe on her right to freedom of movement, expression and association.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

I will start by reminding us of what Martin Luther King Junior said to the black Americans before the American revolution "so much evil is done in the world today not because of the people that actually propagate this evil but because of those who possessing the power to do something sit back and do nothing". This implies that it is incumbent on all of us not just to know how women's rights are violated but to stand up and do something for posterity.

Women suffer all forms of indignation and torture all over the world. In Mexico for instance a woman is raped every nine minutes. Recently it was reported that the female soldiers were raped by their male colleagues. So the problem of violence against women is not just inherent in our society alone but it is a global phenomena. As a result of the ubiquitousness of violence against women the United Nations found it expedient to entrench into the UN charter some clauses that will protect women against violence. Certain rights were declared. The rights that concern our theme are: right to life, right to liberty, right to security, right to recognition, right to good standard of living, right to association, right to effective remedy by a competent tribunal in case of violation of these rights.

In elucidating my concepts I will classify violence into two (a) attitudinal violence and (b) Sexual violence.

Attitudinal violence involves cultural and non cultural practices against women such as female genital mutilation, purdah system, widowhood rite, wife or widow inheritance, early marriage, male child preferences, property ownership or inheritance, wife battering, sexist government laws and policies.

Sexual violence involves all forms of violence of sexual harassment and all forms of violence of sexual nature e.g. rape, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment and all forms of indecent endeavours.

I will expatiate on some of this form of violence, beginning with attitudinal violence. Women have remained unfortunate victims of cultural oppression. Women are seen as second class citizens they are subjected to all forms of humiliation like female genital mutilation, where young girls are deprived of the most sensitive part of their body.

This is a practice that is coercively enforced in many societies. Women are not given the right to choose the opposite option. This is a violation of the right to freedom of expression. There are many other cultural practices that time will not allow me to decipher but I will mention them and explain a few. The purdah system is a form of attitudinal violence. Infact a women in this condition has been denied of her right to freedom of movement. In our society women are seen as commodities. Thus a price is placed on them when they are being given out for marriage. This is an attitude that can psychologically reduce a women to a commodity that can be utilized to suit the owner's purpose. At times young girls are even forced to marry at an early age by parents in exchange for money and other economic benefits. This may result in Vesico Vaginal Fistulae (VVF). Male children are preferred in the society. In the past only male children were sent to school but today people are increasingly becoming educated on the importance of education for males and females alike. Nevertheless in some communities women are still regarded as household commodity. To show the content of the subjective view of women in our society, women have no rights to inheritance. When a man dies, his son inherits his property even if the daughter is the first child.

Another form of attitudinal violence is political marginalisation. Women are visible victims of political oppression and they are inherently forgotten in the society. The traditional political system relegates women to the background example the Ibo society. The women have no right to speak in the village meetings where important decisions are taken. They are not part of the policy making body but are coerced

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is overlooked in this instance. Students are not left out in this form of harassment, female students too are sometimes asked for sex in exchange for grades. Infact sex has been reduced to a marketable act and women are the objects of exploitation. Even some married women are sexually harassed by their husbands who do not give them an opportunity to say no. It is more frustrating when members of the police force refuse to accept complaints from women against their husbands in case of battering and sexual harassment. They treat such complaints as purely private family matters.

Ladies that are raped or sexually harassed are discouraged in terms of seeking redress in the court because of the attitude of the force agents to such cases.

## CONCLUSION AND PROGNOSIS FOR ACTION

My prescriptions are very simple and practicable. The programme we are having right now is part of the emancipation process because it is an empowerment educational, enlightening and a conscientising adventure. It is often said that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. The knowledge of the truth is the beginning of freedom. This programme is not organised to conscientise you for the sake of educating you but to empower you to bring a cataclysmic change to the socio-

political media you find yourself in.

We should insist on Anja parity Ketokos Ki's call for Parity Democracy. This included equal representation of men and women in political and economic spheres and the eradication of male sovereignty. Let the voice of women be heard within state boundaries and international boundaries.

The absolute, perpetual, indivisible power of the masculinised deity must be broken. The men cannot continue to speak for the women.

Enlightenment programmes should be organised like seminars, symposiums and the media should be utilized in educating women on their rights.

The government should enact laws and punishment for violence against women. Cases of wife battering and sexual harassment by husbands should not be regarded as private but cases of social perversion.

There should be a kind of rehabilitation programme to rehabilitate men that have problems of sexuality and wife battering. People with such problems should be confronted for their self destructiveness and violence and they should be told about the costs: emotional, physical and economic of these counter productive patterns. The problem of violence against women is not an irrepressible one. We can do something, and we must start today to contribute our quota towards the emancipation of women fold.