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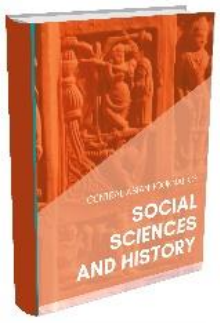


# The Role of Tertiary Institutions in Combating Gender Based Violence in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed the role of tertiary institutions in combating gender based violence in Nigerian. Secondary data used in the paper were collected from print and online publications. The paper concluded that tertiary institutions have multi-roles to play in the reduction of the menace of gender based violence in Nigeria. The paper specifically identified teaching, researching and provision of community services that are gender based violence inclined as some of the roles of tertiary institutions. Also, development of gender based violence academic programmes and establishment of special centre on studies of gender based violence. Based on these findings, the paper recommended that; tertiary institutions should constantly organize seminars, conferences and workshops via their various Centres for Gender Studies to sensitize the general public and tertiary institution's community about the importance of gender equality and the menace of gender based violence. Tertiary institutions management should make sure that students are being treated fairly and equally in any conversation. Tertiary institutions syllabus should be made inclusive, that can promote gender equality. Tertiary institutions should advocate for scholarships be carter for the marginalized women and those who have suffered

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gender based violence. Tertiary institutions should come up with suggestions to discourage gender segregation. Tertiary institutions should engage government on policies to encourage women empowerment and policies to support provision of social safety net.

## Introduction

Globally, about 1 in 3 women experience one form of gender based violence in their lifetime and that sexual violence was reported more than physical and emotional violence (Fawole & Dagunduro 2014, & WHO 2020). Also, report has that many as 38 per cent of victims (women) died at the hands of an intimate partners (Perrin, Marsh, Clough, Desgroppes, Phanuel, Abdi et al. 2019)

In Nigeria, sexual violence was also reported more than physical and emotional violence. In addition, Fawole *et al*. reported that sexual violence was the most commonly reported form of GBV compared to physical and psychological violence in Abuja, Nigeria (Fawole & Dagunduro 2014). In Enugu, Onyinye Hope Chime et al (2022) revealed that sexual violence was also reported more than physical and emotional violence among survivors in the age group 20-39 years, followed closely by cases reported among persons aged below 19 years who were mainly children.

Also, a two-year retrospective study (2014-2016) among survivors of GBV in Enugu reveals a 50.8% increase among girls aged 11-22 years, while a prevalence as high as 74.4% was recorded in survivors below 18 years in another study (Okolo, Okolo 2018 and Beyene, Chojenta, Roba, Melka, Loxton. 2019). Following a chain of reports on both physical and sexual violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, a state of emergency on GBV was declared in Nigeria in June 2020 resulting in the initiation of sex offender registries and stiffer punishment for offenders (World Health Organization Nigeria (WHO 2020).

Gender based violence in Nigeria has been seen and described as a national problem that needs maximum attention from the government and stakeholders such as international institutions and tertiary institutions. Although GBV has been increasingly recognized as a social problem and public health problem, yet it has been largely ignored. In view of the above, the paper explored the role of tertiary institutions in combating in GBV in Nigeria.

Tertiary institutions are seen as places to look upon when there are pressing issues facing the nation. There has been agreement among scholars that tertiary institutions are designed to proffer solutions to national problems such as GBV. Ogunode & Odo, (2023) believed that tertiary institutions are micro sections of the larger society. They are organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programme, research and provision of community service. They can also be seen as subsets of the general society that are made of collection of different people, cultures, life styles and values. Societies globally have been known to have some peculiar social problems. Social problems of most societies are migrated into the tertiary institutions because the societies and the tertiary institutions are inseparable to some extent. Also, Ogunode, (2020), viewed tertiary education as the post-secondary school education designed for the production of manpower. Higher education is an education that awards certificates after the completion of the programme. Tertiary education is the education that deals with teaching programme, research programme and community service. Tertiary education is the

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peak of educational institutions and it is an organized educational system that is meant to support the social, economic and political development of the country (Ogunode, 2020).

Federal Republic of Nigeria national policy on education (2013), noted tertiary education is an education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI). Tertiary education is a system that is teaching, research inclined for the production of skilled professionals for the total development of the nation. Tertiary education benefits not just the individual, but society as a whole. Graduates of tertiary education are more environmentally conscious, have healthier habits, and have a higher level of civic participation. Also, increased tax revenues from higher earnings, healthier children, and reduced family size all build stronger nations. Tertiary education institutions prepare individuals not only by providing them with adequate and relevant job skills, but also by preparing them to be active members of their communities and societies (World Bank Education Overview undated). Akinwadae (2019) observed every country in the world depends on its tertiary institutions for good governance, political stability, cultural, scientific and technological development as well as socio- economic break through. Tertiary institutions are structured to be innovative, problem solving, agent of society transformation. Tertiary institutions have great roles in combatting and mitigating gender based violence in Nigeria as they have done to break down discrimination based on race, gender and sexuality. Falola (2022) opined that tertiary institutions as powerful institutions, also teaches about the problems and changes in the societies. Tertiary institutions is a community that is made up of people who are intellectual, research inclined, knowledgeable, access to information and problem solver. Tertiary institutions are needed to use to drive positive change in the country.

**Concept of Gender Based Violence in Nigeria**

According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), gender-based violence against women is violence directed primarily against a woman because she is a woman, a weaker vessel. Furthermore, violence against women is recognized as a kind of gender discrimination that stems from historically unequal power relations between the male and female, which successfully prevents women from having the same rights and freedoms in society as their male counterparts. Similarly, CEDAW considers gender-based violence against women to be one of the most fundamental social, political, cultural, and economic systems that perpetuate women's enslavement, including their subjugation to males and their assigned roles in human civilizations. According to the CEDAW, the term GBV further enhances comprehension of this violence as a cultural and social problem rather than an individual one, demanding urgent and systemic solutions rather than treating the incidents and occurrences separately in any part of the world (CEDAW, 2017). Sexual and gender-based violence is complex as it is directly linked to social and political power dynamics and norms such as inequality of the sexes, patriarchy, engrained biases, misconceptions, myths and stereotypes that continue to exist and proliferate from North to South. This often results in sexual and gender-based violence being considered "merely as a women's issue" and dismissed as a "lesser" crime or a crime that is difficult to "identify and prosecute". Thus crimes and violations of a sexual and gender-based character largely go unpunished.

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Article 2 of the Convention on Elimination of all forms Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) World Health Organization, (2013) maintained that sexual and gender-based violence including sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. It occurs in the home, on the streets, in schools, workplaces, farm fields, and refugee camps, during times of peace as well as in conflicts and crises. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common forms of VAW; it refers to behavior by a current or previous husband, boyfriend, or other partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviour (WHO (World Health Organization, 2013). Such violence both reflects and reinforces underlying gender-based inequalities (UNFPA 2007)). Article 2 of the Convention on Elimination of all forms Discriminations against Women (CEDAW) notes that; violence against women includes sexual, physical, and psychological violence in the: Family: (such as battering, sexual abuse of children, female genital mutilation/cutting, and rape); Community: such as (sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation, trafficking, and forced prostitution); and State: such as (poorly drafted or unenforceable laws for violence against women, law enforcement agents who violate women, the lack of facilities and education for prevention and treatment of women exposed to violence, the sanctioning and reinforcement of unequal gender relations.

There are numerous commonly used terms for referring to violence against women, even though none are universally agreed upon. Many terms, which are based on diverse theoretical perspectives and disciplines, have different meanings in different contexts and countries.

1. Violence against women (VAW) is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (UNGA, 1993)
2. Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender. It constitutes a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical and mental integrity. (Council of Europe, 2012)
3. Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviour. (WHO, 2013)
4. Sexual violence/sexual assault is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part, or object. (WHO, 2012)
5. Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.
6. Sexual harassment is unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. (UN Secretary General, 2008)
7. Female genital mutilation/cutting: all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. (WHO 2013)
8. Child marriage: a formal marriage or informal union before age 18.

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The Role of Tertiary Institutions in combating Gender Based Violence in Nigeria

Tertiary education is a tool for socializing Nigerian students for sustaining social development and traditions in addition to the modification or changing of same in line with extant ideologies, ideological expansion or reformation. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria have a great role to play when it comes to issues of gender based violence. Some of the roles of tertiary institutions include; teaching and research on prevention of gender based violence, provision of community service to sensitise the public on the dangers and prevention of gender based violence, development of academic programme on gender based violence and establishment of centre on gender based violence.

**Teaching**

Tertiary institutions are institutions saddled with responsibilities of character building and behaviour modifications. It is expected of every tertiary institutions graduate to have acquired a positive best acceptable societal value that is gender friendly which is regarded as international best practices. With this functions and responsibilities, tertiary institutions in Nigeria should ensure that lecturers create time during the lectures to teach the students gender friendly skills and behaviour. As institutions of education and research, universities have the potential to be "pivotal change agents" in catalysing transitions towards sustainability (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020), Trainor & Leko (2014) noted that tertiary institutions can help students develop their character, personalities and right behavioural altitudes. This role goes beyond the traditional approach of focusing on learning and research. Character is one of the most important factors that facilitate the achievement of success in professional and personal life. Character development equips students with skills, and knowledge that empower them to make informed and responsible decisions in their lives. It is the one factor that connects their personal and professional aspects of their lives. Saichaie and Morphew (2014) and Ivypanda (2020) agreed that, life has many challenges that require social skills, critical thinking and responsible decisions. It is important for universities to design their curriculums in ways that encourage purposeful exploration and self-reflection in order to develop character that creates a foundation for distinction and respect for human dignity Tertiary institutions should teach students to embrace life style that are gender equality friendly. It is important for students to develop values that make them caring, proactive, and understanding citizens who are ready to ensure society devoid of gender based violence.

Tertiary institutions can structure their General Studies programme and curriculum to include gender-equitable education and gender-based violence education. Gender-equitable education systems empower both girls and boys and foster the development of life skills that young people need to succeed, such as self-management, communication, negotiation, and critical thinking. They reduce skills gaps that perpetuate pay disparities and help entire countries succeed. School-based gender-based violence and harmful behaviours, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, can be reduced through gender-equitable education systems. Gender-equitable education systems encourage both girls and boys to attend school, resulting in increased national prosperity. Inclusion of gender-equitable education into General Studies Programme courses of tertiary institutions can help boys benefit directly from an education devoid of unfavourable gender norms. Masculine standards can encourage disengagement from education, child labour, gang violence, and recruitment into armed groups in many nations. Tertiary institutions roles in reduction of gender based violence should include; establishment of academic programme that are gender based violence inclined, ensure implementation of gender policies, organize annual sensitization programme and suggest policy

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measure to eradicate gender based violence. In addition, students should learn about social skills that promoted gender equality and learn how to be involve in actions that promote and advocate for gender empowerment in the society.

**Research**

Tertiary institutions' major programmes are teaching, researching, and community services. Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) submitted that research is the second cardinal programme of higher institutions. Research is very important to the development of the society. Misra (2023) noted that research in tertiary institutions is a process of systematic inquiry that involves gathering of data; documentation of critical information; and analysis and understanding of that data/information in accordance with appropriate procedures based on scientific principles. The research assesses the validity of a hypothesis; accumulates substantive knowledge and findings for sharing them in proper manners, and generates questions for further inquiries. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, and Ajape (2021) asserted that research is conducted mostly in the tertiary institutions environment with the objectives to solve problems affecting the society. The academic staff is saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out researches in the universities. Conducting research is one criterion for measuring their performance. Paul (2015) and Yusuf (2012) submitted that the conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprised Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education. The academic staff of these institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions are primarily based on their research outputs. Apart from the academic staff being promoted through research publications, research activities enhance their credibility, status, and also add value both to their immediate community and the larger global community. Tertiary institutions have many roles to play in carrying out researches on gender related issues as it affects women development in the society. Falola (2022) noted that universities are referred to as research and development centres which means that, from a distant and close look, the university has an unending obligation to drive research and development for academic or educational upliftment and to proffer solutions to society's core problems

Tertiary institutions can engage on researches on various issues including gender-based violence in Nigeria. Masters and PhD students can be used to carry intensive research on critical area of gender based violence in the society. The result of such researches can be used to make informed decisions that will help to mitigate gender based violence in the society. The traditional roles of universities include research and instruction with the aim of providing solutions to community's problems. The result of tertiary institutions researches can proffer solutions to problems like gender based violence in the country. Research in times past has led to increase in the body of knowledge that has widened the scope of tertiary institutions with regard to handling fundamental national pressing problems such as social vices, climate cane and gender based violence. Tertiary institutions through innovation and advanced research can help to solving the problems of ender based violence in Nigeria. . One of the major roles that tertiary institutions should play in combating gender based violence in Nigeria is to embark on community based research and action research to investigate gender based violence and women depression and come up with findings and make recommendations to the government on solving critical problems of the society. Misra (2023) opined that research is important in tertiary education because it helps to inform policies and practices that can improve the quality of education and effect social change. It also helps to advance knowledge and understanding in a particular field or discipline. Research can inform decision-making in higher education by providing evidence-based recommendations for policies and practices that can improve student social skills outcomes. Research

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can also help identify areas of need and opportunities for innovation and improvement Researches on various related gender based violence by tertiary institution in Nigeria can facilitate and inform the required social transformation in the society. Research results and recommendations can aid the processes of policy formulation that can influence political and policy change in Nigeria. It is believed that if academics generate information, then society's leaders can use such information to make wise decisions that promote the public good.

To ensure full participation of tertiary institutions in the activities of combating gender based violence, Ivypanda (2020) believed that to do this, tertiary institutions or universities should broaden work allocation models to allow at least 10% of time for advocacy and engagement with policy processes, including public engagement and education, and working with campaign organisations and elected officials. Promoting engaged research sabbaticals would allow such activities to be ramped up in the run-up to key political events, such as the conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change or UN Convention on Biological Diversity, allowing academics to devote their energies at key times when the opportunity for impact is maximized and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Tertiary institutions from researches can come up with policy measures to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labour between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making.

**Community Service**

Community service is another important function of tertiary institutions. It involves all activities to advance social-economic and development of the institutions host communities. Ogunode, Iyabode, and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) observed that Community service programme is the third cardinal programme of the tertiary institutions. Community service programme is an organized and planned service programme of higher institutions for the benefit and betterment of their host communities. Community service programme of higher institutions are community inclined services initiated by the institutions to develop the communities. Community service of higher institutions is service provided by institutions to benefits the community people. Community service programmes are done near the area where the institutions are located so that the host community can enjoy the benefits of the institutions. Community service of higher institution includes all kinds of services that are meant to improve the wellbeing of the people and the society at general. Community service is essential service designed by institutions to provide socio-economic development to the community. Community service is one of the roles tertiary institutions should play in contributing towards societal development via active community service provision. The various ways tertiary institutions can used to carry out sensitization on gender friendly values and orientation in community is through community based engagement and advocacy. Femi (2019) and UNICEF (2020) noted that tertiary institutions should engage in advocacy programme in the host communities on issues related to gender equality, gender equity, women empowerment and discourage gender based violence. In addition, host community should learn about how to support policies and actions and collaborate with international institutions to eradicate gender based violence. Tertiary institutions should help host community to determine their roles in gender equality, and gender equity and how to engage the government on women empowerment.

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Tertiary institutions can engage communities on need to ensure education inclusion via advocacy and sensitization. This will promote gender equality which is important for reduction of gender based violence in communities. Through broad-based technical assistance and training, tertiary institutions can work to promote communities or citizens' engagement with government institutions and to advocate for legal and policy reforms and promote gender equality, women empowerment and decision-making processes. Tertiary institutions can improve commitment with government to increase legislative advocacy, promote transparency and good governance, support and promote laws reforms, enhance citizen's access to public policies and advance anti-corruption campaigns.'

**Development of academic Programme on Gender Based Violence**

Development of academic programme on gender based violence in Nigerian tertiary institutions can help to produce more professionals on various aspects of gender based violence in Nigeria. Production of more professionals in gender based violence studies will help to combat the rate of gender based violence in the society because the more people are aware and are educated the less gender based violence will occur in the society. Ogunode and Idris (2023) and Otonko, (2012) maintained that universities globally are established to produce manpower that will work in every sector of the economy. The universities are saddled with the responsibility of advancing the development of the country through the training and production of the right personnel to fill in the economy. The universities are to help in the rapid industrialization of the economy. This is done by providing manpower with adequate professional, technical, managerial and soft skills in the society. The university system is burdened with producing sound and effective citizens in society and developing higher self-awareness and self-realization of individuals at various tasks, enhancing better human relationships, national consciousness and effective citizenship (Otonko, 2012). Universities are known for introducing new programmes to meet up with the demand of the modern economy. The traditional roles of the universities are namely; teaching; research; dissemination of existing and new information; pursuit of service to the community; and being a storehouse of knowledge. The general philosophy of Universities is to produce graduates with high academic and ethical standards and adequate practical exposure for self-employment as well as being of immediate value to industry and the community in general. The reasons for introducing new programmes in the higher institutions include; addressing manpower shortage in the forth-industry; helping reduce unemployment in the country; meeting up with the demand for ICT skills shortage in the country; to provide manpower with the right skills and qualifications to the emerging sector (Ogunode & Idris, 2023).

**Establishment of Centre on Gender Based Violence**

Tertiary institutions have the power to create departments, faculties and establish centres to focus on particular studies. Since the tertiary institutions are places to look upon for solution to pressing societal problems. It is expected for tertiary institutions to establish centres that focus on carrying out research on gender-based violence in Nigeria and across the world. Tertiary institutions have critical roles to play in the addressing the social problem of sexual and gender-based violence. Their roles in combating sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria includes; collaboration, researching and advocating. Tertiary institutions' efforts towards a gender violence free society include; promoting solutions-focused research, institutionalizing "education for sustainable development" and reducing their own institutional footprints. Tertiary institutions can also contribute to the peaceful society through engaging with the public and other audiences outside the sector. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria can embark on sensitization in communities to teach community members about the

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importance of gender equality. They can create centers that would be used to document gender violations happening in educational institutions.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the role of tertiary institutions in combating gender based violence in Nigerian. The paper concluded that tertiary institutions have multi-roles to play in the reduction of the menace of gender based violence in Nigeria. The paper specifically identified teaching, researching and provision of community services that are gender based violence inclined as some of the roles of tertiary institutions. Also, development of gender based violence academic programmers and establishment of special centre on studies of gender based violence are also among the crucial roles of tertiary institutions can explored to reduce the problem of gender based violence in Nigeria. Based on these findings, the paper recommended; that tertiary institutions should constantly organize seminars, conferences and workshops via their various Centre for Gender Studies to teach tertiary institutions communities about the importance of gender equality and discourage gender based violence on the campuses and society generally. Tertiary institutions management should make sure that students are being treated fairly in the tertiary institutions where they feel equally about taking part in any conversation. Their syllabus should be made inclusive, that can promote gender equality. They should advocate for scholarships to be created for the marginalized women and those who have suffered gender discrimination. Tertiary institutions should come up with suggestions to discourage gender segregation; engage government on policies to encourage women empowerment and policies to support provision of social safety net.

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