

Full Length Research

Terrorism and Violence among Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Adolescent girls and young women with disabilities have a higher risk of experiencing terrorism and violence. All forms of violence (including physical, psychological, sexual and economic) increases the vulnerability of persons with disabilities of all ages and gender but it affects adolescent girls and women with disabilities more. This paper examines terrorism and violence on adolescent girls and women with disabilities in Plateau State. The effects of terrorism and violence on adolescent girls and women with disabilities are presented. In addition, policy considerations and collaboration against terrorism and violence on women and girls with disabilities are also highlighted. The paper also proffered recommendations in terms of the provision of a systemic approach that will identify adolescent girls and women with disabilities at risk of abuse and provide referral service appropriately and developing a database for persons with disabilities (most especially adolescent girls and women with disabilities) is necessary because women and girls usually have additional barriers due to their gender and disability especially during terrorist and conflict/violent attacks. In addition, active participation and collaborative partnerships in disability issues among Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) should be encouraged at the community, district, local government, state and national levels in Nigeria.

Keywords: Terrorism, Violence, Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the World Report on Disability, over 13 million Nigerians living with disabilities are women and girls. These categories of persons with disabilities are at risk of sickness, injury, negligence, maltreatment and

exploitation. The Grassroots Researchers Association (2000) asserts that, about over 1 billion persons or 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability. Similarly the World Disability Report of (2011) stated that about 25 million Nigerians have at least one disability and more than 50% of the 25 million Nigerians

with disabilities are females. Women and girls with disabilities are three times at greater risk of suffering physical, sexual and economic abuse than women without disabilities. Women and girls with disabilities have remained invisible both because of their gender and their disabilities (Dunja, 2022).

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), Disability is a condition whereby impairment makes it more difficult for individuals with the condition to perform certain activities (activity limitation) and also interact with the world around them (participation restriction). Disability is caused by impairment in an individuals' body structure or function, or mental functioning: these include vision loss, hearing loss (deaf or hard of hearing, physical disability, intellectual disability autism spectrum disorders, mental health conditions etc. Generally the three broad categories of disabilities are intellectual/cognitive, sensory and physical impairments which could be further classified by degree of loss (range from mild-moderate-severe-profound) and age of onset (congenital or adventitious).

Terrorism and violence affects the political, economic and social aspects of the society as well as the overall quality of life of individuals in these communities Fernando (2020) opines that terrorism is presented as (i) violence which produces widespread disproportionate emotional reactions e.g. fear and anxiety (ii) the violence is systematic and unpredictable and (iii) violence conveys messages and threats in order to communicate and obtain social control. According to Adesina and Kanmadi, (2020), terrorism has become one of the leading causes of disability recently. The increased attacks by armed bandit groups, Fulani herdsmen, herders and farmers clashes, book haram and Islamic states has escalated overtime and has left civilians displaced and at high risk of loss of livelihood and therefore requiring urgent assistance. However, this can only be made possible through actions plans that will inform policy in issues of terrorism and violence and its effects on women and girls living with disabilities because terrorism and disability are big global (especially Nigeria) phenomena that have become a major concern to all in recent times.

Terrorism and violence affects the physical health, psychological health, social relationships and environmental health of persons with disabilities (especially adolescent girls and women with disabilities) few studies carried out on terrorism and violence in the context of disability context in relation to their quality of life. Moreso, the realities of people with disabilities during armed conflicts, terrorism and violence and have not been extensively examined by researchers (Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme, 2015, 2017, Margolin & Cook 2024). In addition, very few are conducted and reported. The experiences of adolescent girls and women with disabilities are linked to oppression, segregation, marginalization, isolation etc. which affects

their quality of life negatively. In addition, there is the dearth of research in the disability studies as it relates to women and girls in Nigeria. Despite its impact of adolescent girls and women with disabilities, few research studies are carried out in this area. Therefore this paper examines terrorism and violence on adolescent girls and women with disabilities in Plateau State.

Effects of Terrorism and Violence on Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities

Violence against girls with disabilities is systemic and structural and is perpetuated in laws, policies, norms and institutional practices, through which interpersonal violence is reinforced. Violence occurs in both public and private spaces, across sectors, including education, health care, social services, justice and the security sectors and in also in all settings and contexts, (including homes, residential facilities and institutions, social groups and the community, rural and urban areas etc.) (United Nations Children' Education Fund (UNICEF, 2023). The forms of terrorism and violence attacks on women and girls includes physical, psychological, sexual, human rights violation and economic violence including suicide attacks, bombings, stabbings, airplane hijackings, vehicular attacks, kidnappings and assassinations (Margolin & Cook 2024).

As asserted by Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme, (2017), women with hearing impairment could not flee from conflict zones because of their inability to hear the sound of gunshots and even if they are also to flee they do so in the direction of the gunshots (due to their inability to hear the direction of the sound) and some of them get killed in the process. Some persons with physical impairments who are not wheel chairs or other forms of ambulatory devices are left behind during this clashes because everyone tries to save his/her own life (some parents leave their children with disabilities behind as well as siblings of persons with disabilities).

Women and girls with disabilities have experienced great difficulties and untold hardships due to terrorism and violent clashes as they find it impossible to flee from conflict due to their disabilities (which could range from sensory, intellectual/cognitive and physical impairments), have no designated Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps, they are not given special considerations in refugee camps, cannot access special medical services, counselling services, social services, financial services due to their disabilities. This affirms the assertion by Dunja, (2022) which states that women and girls with disabilities are less likely to have access to recovery/rehabilitation services, access to justice in situations of conflict and access to humanitarian emergencies. In addition they experience sexual exploitation and abuse, molestation and rape due to their

vulnerability in existing IDP and refugee camps.

The general quality of life of persons with and without disabilities in the North East Nigeria has been affected negatively by recurrent terrorisms, conflicts and violent clashes. The insurgency in Northern Nigeria as asserted by the Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labour report of (2021) is as a result of the persistent militant and terrorist groups of Boko Haram and Islamist State in West Africa. In addition to the activities of Fulani herdsmen, kidnapers, armed bandits, communal clashes over farm lands, etc. These terrorists groups have conducted numerous civilian attacks over the years on government, and civilian targets, institutions of learning, communities, places religious worship, etc. This has resulted in thousands of deaths, severe injuries (that have resulted in disabilities), numerous human rights abuses, and destruction of properties, widespread internal displacement of more than three million persons and external displacement of more than an estimated 327.000 Nigerians refugees to neighboring countries over the years (Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labour, 2021)

Moreso, a study by Taft, Blyth, and Murphyin (2016) on the impacts of conflict and violence on women and girls in Plateau state over an 18 (eighteen) month period (between 2012-2016) highlights long-term impacts of land and inter-communal conflict on women and girls. The results of the study indicated that women and girls reported incident type (a) Domestic violence, sexual assault & other interpersonal incidents; 84%, (b) Inter-communal violence; 12% (c) Unspecified collective violence; 4% while reported cases of women and girls fatalities include (a) Land conflict/Inter-communal violence; 82% (b) Unspecified collective violence; 14% (c) Domestic violence, sexual assault & other interpersonal incidents; 4%. In addition, the findings revealed that, beyond being victims of direct physical attacks, including sexual abuse, during land and inter-communal conflict, the effects of displacement and increased economic and social vulnerabilities continue to impact the daily lives of women and girls, long after violence has subsided.

Policy Considerations and Collaboration against Terrorism and Violence on Women and Girls with disabilities

The Nigerian government approved the establishment a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities in 2020. This is line with the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act passed into law in January, 2019. According to the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2020), the legislation is aimed at improving the welfare and inclusion of persons with disabilities and also addresses some of the factors impeding the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Therefore all laws, policies and programmes in

the county are expected to comply with the provisions this legislation. This development has given rise to the recent direction and advocacy in the area of disability studies and also ensuring its full implementation in Nigeria. Despite this position, these policy statements are yet to be adapted for full implementation.

As presented by Dunja, (2022), in an evidence submitted to a recent inquiry by the United Kingdom (UK) parliament concerning violence against women and girls with disabilities, indicated that they were twice as likely to experience violence and abuse compared to women and girls without disabilities. The above scenario is more pronounced in the North East Nigeria where terrorism and violence are on the increase. From the foregoing, promoting inclusive practices will only be possible if the rights of women and girls with and persons with disabilities in general are protected, resolving conflicts, ensuring relative peace, ensuring that persons with disabilities are protected during terrorist attacks, conflicts and violence.

Moreso, in the United Nations Children' Education Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), World Health Organization (WHO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) have worked together to develop an inter-agency statement on violence against girls with disabilities, listing the main rights violations they face, along with key advocacy messages targeting States, international organizations, civil society and any other stakeholders, highlighting areas where the implementation of the right of girls with disabilities to be free from violence can be strengthened. These statements include and are not limited to the following: (a) strengthening legislation and policies to ensure that they expressly prohibit all forms of violence against girls with disabilities and provide appropriate and sufficient punishment for perpetrators (b) The allocation of necessary, adequate and sufficient human, financial and technical resources, to the maximum available, to ensure the provision of inclusive services and the guarantee of all rights of girls with disabilities, including through international cooperation if necessary and (c) States have the obligation to act with due diligence to prevent violence and human rights violations, to protect child victims and witnesses of violence, to investigate and to punish those responsible, and to provide redress accordingly (UNICEF, 2023). Moreso, other international organizations, civil society and stakeholders have worked together to develop an inter-agency statement on violence against girls with disabilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Girls and young women with disabilities experience up to 10 (ten) times more violence than those without disabilities (Women and Girls Resource Guide 2019). In order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities, it is pertinent that mechanisms are put in place to curb the prevalence of terrorism and violence against women and girls with disability in Nigeria. In line with this, the following recommendations are therefore proffered:

Research: Research is necessary because it provides data and evidence on the phenomenon. Data is inevitable in providing data that will be relevant in policy development and action in disability issues. Policy makers depend on data from research to enable them plan, develop and implement. There is need for continuous research on terrorism and violence on adolescent girls and women with disabilities in Plateau State specifically and Nigerian a whole. Data from these research studies will help to develop specific programs for adolescent girls and women with disabilities.

Policies and Legislation to address violence against women and girls with disability: Strengthening policy and legislative frameworks are essential in addressing issues of terrorism and violence among adolescent girls and women with disabilities in Nigeria. It also promotes inclusion, provides access to legal services that, ensure prosecution and punishment of those responsible for violence against girls and women with disabilities, etc. Policies and legal frameworks are necessary not only to prevent impunity but also to obtain redress, enhance access to justice through speedy judicial process and also eradicated the menace. The Violence Against Women and Girls Resource Guide (2019) states that 'where necessary, support the development of new legislation that bans all forms of violence against women and girls, including against those with disabilities, ensures that law enforcement, health care, educational services, and social support services are accessible to persons with disabilities.'

Identification and Referrals: There is need to provide system that will identify adolescent girls and women with disabilities at risk of abuse and provide referral service appropriately. Communities should liaise with local law enforcement officials, health care centres, non-governmental organizations, Plateau State social welfare departments, advocates of human right issues and other relevant service providers for swift referrals, information and services.

Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs): There is need to develop active inclusion, collaborative and partnership strategies to ensure full participation of adolescent girls and women with disabilities within their representative organizations within Plateau State. Organizations of persons with disabilities should be

encouraged to participate actively in disability issues at the community, district, local government, state and national levels.

Government Participation: The plateau state government should increase funding of programmes on gender-based violence that will promote sharing of information, promote sensitization and awareness programmes that will educate citizens on issues of terrorism and violence, promote the use of social media in providing relevant information and discouraging negative comments/Information.

Database for Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities: A database for persons with disabilities and most especially adolescent girls and women with disabilities is necessary because women and girls usually have additional barriers due to their gender and disability especially during terrorist and conflict/violent attacks. However, this cannot be possible without data which is gotten only through research of this nature to proffer recommendation and suggestions that will inform policy development in the area of peace building as well as ensure peace and security of lives (including that of persons with disabilities) in Nigeria. Therefore, data from research studies will be of immense benefit to the increasing population of persons with special needs especially adolescent girls and women with disabilities in Nigeria and also fill the gap of the dearth of research in this area.

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