



Title: The Interaction between the socioeconomic characteristics and Perception of the social effect of sexual violence

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Abstract

This paper explored the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics and perception of the social effect of sexual violence using a cross-sectional research design and a qualitative approach. The study population was seven hundred and fourteen (714), representing the number of reported cases of sexual violence among women of reproductive age (15-49 years) from a Non-Governmental Organisation in Rivers State. Fifteen participants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Results from the thematic analysis and data synthesis demonstrate that survivors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience SV, which can lead to a greater sense of stigma and shame. The study, therefore, recommends that economically empowering women could be instrumental in repositioning the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics and perception of the social effect of sexual violence.

Keywords: Sexual Violence, Women of reproductive age, Social effect, intersectionality.

Introduction:

Sexual violence is any sexual activity that happens when consent is not obtained or freely given and poses a severe public health problem that profoundly impacts the survivor's health, opportunity, and well-being. Sexual violence impacts every community and affects people of

all genders, sexual orientations, and ages. Anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence. Sexual violence against women globally is commonplace with heightened endemic levels, although the variation in age amongst survivors is necessary to establish disaggregation. Abrahams & et al. (2014) opined that worldwide in 2010, 7.2 percent of women older than 15 had reported ever having experienced non-partner sexual violence asserting the possibility of women of reproductive age experiencing greater incidence of sexual violence when compared to other women. Socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) are the attributes that define an individual or group in a society (Ribeiro, Silva, Alves, Batista, Ribeiro, Schraiber & Barbieri, 2017). It is a multidimensional construct most commonly measured as a combination of education, occupation, and income (Ribeiro et al., 2017). In a literature review of studies conducted in countries on different continents, the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) and the perception of the social effect of sexual violence was considered to be inconclusive.

It was either the variables representing socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) that were determined without taking into account measurement error because the analyses were not adjusted or because of the socioeconomic homogeneity of the samples (Taillieu & Brownridge, 2010). However, a review of African studies revealed low socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) as a risk factor for intimate partner violence (Shamu, Abrahams, Temmerman, Musekiwa & Zarowsky, 2011). Sexual violence happens when consent is not obtained or freely given, posing a severe public health problem to the survivor's well-being (Shamu et al., 2011). Sexual violence occurs similarly in all socioeconomic characteristics (Ribeiro et al., 2017). Therefore, the direct/positive and indirect/adverse effects cancel out the total effect of socioeconomic characteristics (SEC). However, survivors with low SEC can suffer more physical/sexual violence (Ribeiro et al., 2017). Sexual violence impacts every community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages (Shamu et al., 2011).

Sexual violence by an intimate partner empirically has been suggested to be related to gender inequality more than to survivors' socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) (d'Oliveira, Schraiber, França-Junior, Ludermir, Portella, Diniz & Valença, 2009). According to (d'Oliveira et al., 2009), strategies to prevent sexual violence against women of reproductive age should include identifying women with low socioeconomic characteristics. This attribute puts women at greater risk for sexual violence. Sexual violence against women globally is significant with a heightened endemic level, although variations in socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) amongst survivors are necessary to establish disaggregation (d'Oliveira

et al., 2009). A World Health Organisation-funded study by Abrahams & et al. (2014) reported that worldwide in 2010, 7.2 percent of women of lower socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) had reported ever having experienced sexual violence. This report asserts the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics (SEC) and the perception of sexual violence.

The significance of this study is that sexual violence has a profound impact on individuals and society as a whole. It can lead to physical and mental health problems, loss of productivity, and social and economic costs. Understanding how socioeconomic factors interact with perceptions of the social effect of sexual violence can help identify vulnerable survivors and develop targeted interventions to prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

There is a complex interaction between the socioeconomic characteristics of individuals and their perception of the social effects of sexual violence. Factors such as income, education, employment status, and ethnicity can influence how people understand and respond to the impact of sexual violence. For example, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be more likely to view sexual violence as a personal rather than a broader societal problem. At the same time, those with higher education levels may be more likely to recognise the systemic nature of the issue and advocate for social change. Similarly, the experiences and perspectives of individuals from different ethnic groups can shape their understanding of the social impact of sexual violence. Some groups are more likely to view it as a deeply ingrained societal issue. In contrast, others may see it as a less prevalent problem. Understanding the complex interplay between socioeconomic characteristics and perceptions of sexual violence can be critical in developing effective prevention and intervention strategies to address this pervasive

This paper aims to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies, promote social justice, and address the devastating impact of sexual violence on individuals. These research questions guided the authors of this paper; (1) how do individual socioeconomic characteristics such as income, education level, and employment status influence perceptions of the social effects of sexual violence? (2) Do individuals with higher levels of socioeconomic status perceive sexual violence as a more significant social issue compared to those with lower socioeconomic status, and if so, why?

Method

An exploratory, cross-sectional study was conducted through a qualitative approach on fifteen female participants who reside in Rivers State, Nigeria. The participants are women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who have experienced sexual violence. They were recruited and selected through an NGO database of reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence. The entire population for the study was 714 reported cases as shared by the NGO, and fifteen were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Result

Table Participants' Basic Information

Pseudo Names	Age	Occupation	Education	Local Government Area
Nkechi	25	Trader	SSCE	Port Harcourt
Peace	30	Public servant	SSCE	Abua/Odual
Martha	23	Student	BSc	Oyigbo
Chinaka	45	Public servant	BSc	Eleme
Doris	18	House help	No education	Khana
Favour	38	Public servant	BSc	Degema
Goodness	26	Trader	BSc	Ahoada East
Victoria	44	Health worker	BSc	Ikwerre
Beauty	31	Housewife	SSCE	Obio-Akpor
Lala	49	Trader	BSc	Port Harcourt
Dr Jessica	33	Program officer	MSc	Port Harcourt
Ugochi	24	NGO program officer	BSc	Obio-Akpor
Uduak	35	Sex worker	SSCE	Oyigbo
Happiness	37	Banker	BSc	Obio-Akpor
Fila	48	Trader	SSCE	Eleme

Source: data collected from December 2022

The study found that socioeconomic characteristics of survivors can significantly impact the perception of the social effects of SV. Survivors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience SV, and this can lead to a greater sense of stigma and shame. SEC

can lead to isolation and a lack of support from family and friends. Survivors from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may have more access to resources and services but may also be more likely to experience victim-blaming and shaming. This can lead to guilt, shame, and fear of speaking out about the experience. Moreover, a lack of support from family and friends and access to resources and services that could help them cope with the trauma of the experience. The perception of the social effects of SV can also be affected by the socioeconomic characteristics of the community. Communities with higher levels of poverty and inequality may be more likely to experience higher levels of SV, which can lead to a greater sense of stigma and shame.

Discussion:

Sexual violence is a pervasive societal issue, and individuals, families, and communities feel its effects. The socioeconomic characteristics of survivors can significantly impact the perception of the social effects of SV. Survivors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience SV, and this can lead to a greater sense of stigma and shame. SEC can lead to isolation and a lack of support from family and friends. Survivors from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may have more access to resources and services but may also be more likely to experience victim-blaming and shaming. This can lead to guilt, shame, and fear of speaking out about the experience.

Moreover, a lack of support from family and friends and access to resources and services that could help them cope with the trauma of the experience. The perception of the social effects of SV can also be affected by the socioeconomic characteristics of the community. Communities with higher levels of poverty and inequality may be more likely to experience higher levels of SV, which can lead to a greater sense of stigma and shame.

Education SV survivors with higher levels of education may be more likely to understand the social effect of SV and the need for prevention. This impression was expressed in the following comments:

I believe that if I was educated, I will not experience sexual violence. Where one lives is important because it can prevent certain things from happening to you. I know that there are women who went to school that have been violated. But it is not common like those who did not go to school like me. (Beauty, 31 years old, housewife, uneducated, Obio-Akpor).

Gender roles and expectations

This can shape the perception of the social effect of SV, as those with traditional gender roles may be more likely to view sexual violence as a normal part of life.

Most of the time, he forces me to sleep with him. He even beats me sometimes when I try to deny him sex. Then, when I complain, he will remind me that I am responsible for having sex with him whether I want it or not because I am his wife. (Beauty, 31 years old, housewife, uneducated, Obio-Akpor).

Cultural norms and values

Just like gender roles and expectations, norms and values can also shape the perception of the social effect of sexual violence. For example, those with more conservative values may be more likely to view SV as a private matter and not something to be discussed publicly.

I did not want to have sex with him because I was angry that he left me at home and went to chase other women, but because he did not meet them, he has now come to have sex with me. I wanted to punish him by preventing him from having sex with me, but he forced me to have sex with him (Lala- 49 years, BSc, trader, Port Harcourt).

Resources and support

The perception of the social effect of SV, as those with access to resources and support may be more likely to understand the long-term social effect of SV and the need for prevention. Dr Jessica (33 years/MSc/NGO program officer corroborates this assumption.

“Access to resources and support can provide more opportunities for survivors of SV to find support and assistance. This support includes access to mental health services, legal aid, and support groups. It can also help survivors better understand the long-term impact of the social effect of sexual violence and the importance of prevention by providing them with information and resources to help them heal. Improved access to resources and support can also help reduce the stigma around sexual violence and create a safer, more supportive environment for all”.

Conclusion:

Socioeconomic characteristics heavily influence the perception of the social effect of sexual SV. People from different socioeconomic backgrounds often have different attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence and its social effects. Therefore, the study found that survivors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have more negative attitudes and beliefs about SV. This finding agrees with Ribeiro, Silva, Alves, Batista, Ribeiro, Schraiber &

Barbieri, (2017) as an attribute that amplifies the perception of the social effect of SV. However, the study also agrees with Taillieu & Brownridge, (2010) that survivors from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often have more positive attitudes and beliefs about SV, believing that it is an individual problem and not indicative of a more significant social issue.

Additionally, the findings agree that low SEC is a risk factor for SV (Shamu, Abrahams, Temmerman, Musekiwa & Zarowsky, 2011). The study affirms that socioeconomic characteristics can influence the likelihood that a survivor will experience or be exposed to sexual violence (Shamu et al., 2011). The study also revealed that survivors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might not have access to the same resources or support systems that those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have, which aligns with (Ribeiro et al., 2017). The study found that gender inequality reflects in survivors' SEC, which agrees with (d'Oliveira, Schraiber, França-Junior, Ludermir, Portella, Diniz & Valença, 2009). Furthermore, it affirms that it can shape their perception of the social effect of sexual violence, as they may see it as a pervasive issue in society rather than an individual one which supports Abrahams & et al., (2014) that in 2010, 7.2 percent of women reported a significant relationship between SEC and the perception of the social effect of SV.

Overall, the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics and the perception of the social effect of SV is complex and dynamic. The study found that the socioeconomic characteristics of survivors can influence an individual's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence and their likelihood of experiencing or being exposed to it, which agrees with (Canan & Levand, 2019). Moreover, the study revealed that survivors, SEC, can shape the perception of the social effect of sexual violence, which can have long-term implications on how society approaches the issue. This assertion agrees with the intersectionality theory on which this study was anchored (Crenshaw, 2017).

Lack of access to resources such as cash, credit and employment is a significant factor in the social effect of SV among survivors. For instance, an unemployed woman is more likely to depend on her perpetrator and may not be able to promote her interests in domestic interactions, which makes her vulnerable to violence, including sexual abuse. Those who participate in the formal economy earn below the minimum wage, and the patrilineal inheritance system deprives women of land ownership. Such conditions increase financial pressures on women, making them financially dependent on their partners; this ultimately increases women's risks of experiencing violence. Most of the participants in this study reported that they were involved in petty trading and farming activities for survival and could

not empower them to be self-sufficient and independent to bargain in intra-household decisions. This account shows that some men often exploit the financial weakness of women to control their sexuality and sexual behaviours leading to sexual violence.

However, it is essential to note that the relationship between poverty and violence may be understood through the concept of masculinity. According to this explanation, economic hardships and the accompanying lack of income among husbands make it difficult for them to live up to their culturally expected role as breadwinners. Such circumstances can produce extreme stress and feelings of inadequacy among husbands, with some likely resorting to alcohol use and other means possible to suppress such frustrations, leading to conflict and violence against spouses. In addition, some participants reported in this study that the lack of job opportunities and their husbands' associated poor financial status promoted marital conflicts, consequently making women vulnerable to sexual violence and other forms of domestic abuse. From this discussion, it is clear that the relationship between poverty and women's vulnerability to sexual violence is complex. Therefore, economically empowering women could be instrumental in repositioning the interaction between socioeconomic characteristics and perception of the social effect of sexual violence.

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Author's biography

Amadi, Jennifer Chinoye is a gender and development consultant/expert. She has conducted qualitative research, designed and implemented programs to engender equitable health, rights and well-being of women and girls. Jennifer is a PhD candidate with the Center for Conflict, Gender and Development Studies, University of Port Harcourt. Her research interests are sexual and gender-based violence, gender and nutrition, mental health, gender nonconforming population, menstrual health and intersectionality. Jennifer is a collaborator (gender expert and researcher) with the Sonder Collective Osk on Optimising adherence for nutrition supplements in Northern Nigeria: Formative research and human-centred design on the Pathways project. She also supports the Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) as the West Africa Liaison for regional engagements. Previously, she implemented an Accelerated Scale-up of Depot Medroxyprogesterone Acetate Subcutaneous (DMPA-SC)/Self-Injection in Nigeria (RASuDiN). Jennifer considers herself a transformational and dynamic leader with an inclusive philosophical way of thinking, seeing and doing things. Typically, Jennifer brings substantial energy and personal commitment to her work. As a person, she holds dear intersectionality, self/collective care, gender transformation, sexual reproductive health and rights.