

A Sociological Analysis of Perpetrators and Facilitators of Gender-Based Violence in Selected Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) remains a pervasive problem in Nigerian tertiary institutions, posing a significant threat to the safety, academic success, and total well-being of students. This study examines the facilitators and perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within selected universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in Nigeria, specifically in Edo, Katsina, and Taraba states. It aims to explore the drivers of SGBV in Nigerian tertiary institutions, identify and categorize the individuals or groups responsible for perpetrating such violence, and investigate the underlying dynamics that contribute to its continued prevalence, despite the existence of policies and previous scholarly interventions. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with students, staff, and relevant stakeholders. Findings reveal that factors such as academic struggles, financial constraints, unsafe environments, cultural norms, and power imbalances drive the prevalence of SGBV. Perpetrators include lecturers, male students, administrative staff, strangers, and intimate partners, while institutional weaknesses exacerbate the issue. The study concludes that ineffective reporting systems, fear of retaliation, and economic vulnerability sustain SGBV. It recommends institutional reforms, strengthened awareness campaigns, enhanced campus security, and robust survivor support mechanisms to foster safer learning environments.

Keywords: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria, Institutional Mechanisms

Introduction

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) remains a pervasive issue in tertiary institutions, significantly impacting students, staff, and institutional integrity, while also representing a significant global social problem that affects individuals across all socio-economic, cultural, and educational contexts. In tertiary institutions in Nigeria, SGBV impacts the academic,

emotional, and social well-being of victims. It is regarded as a harmful action directed at an individual based on their gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The United Nations (2020) defined SGBV as any act that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to an individual, including threats, coercion, or deprivation of liberty. While SGBV is not a respecter of persons, previous studies have shown

that women and girls are disproportionately affected due to societal structures that reinforce patriarchal norms (Amupitan, 2024; Ikuteyijo, et al, 2023). Specifically, in Nigeria, studies indicated that rape, sexual harassment, physical abuse, and emotional violence in educational institutions were common. For instance, Itegi and Ngwauwa (2013) asserted that the migration of GBV from communities to campuses has resulted in a culture of impunity, where perpetrators, including lecturers and students, exploit their power for personal gains.

Although several studies have identified the drivers and perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in various contexts, including tertiary institutions in Nigeria, there has yet to be a sufficient attempt to systematically categorize these drivers and perpetrators, particularly within the Nigerian tertiary education sector. This gap in research poses a significant challenge in developing targeted and effective policies aimed at addressing the root causes of SGBV. Furthermore, the findings on the perpetrators and drivers of SGBV have not been fully explored, creating a knowledge gap that allows for further studies to propel more effective recommendations for addressing the problem of SGBV in universities, especially in Nigeria. Categorizing these drivers and perpetrators is crucial for informing policy formulation and implementation, as it allows for a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to violence in these settings. Such categorization would provide policymakers with the necessary tools to design interventions that are specifically tailored to the unique dynamics within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Additionally, a comprehensive approach that includes the identification of various categories of perpetrators and drivers would also facilitate the development of prevention programs, enhance support systems for survivors, and strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks needed to combat SGBV more effectively. Given the complexity of addressing sexual violence and abuse in Nigerian tertiary institutions, a holistic, multi-faceted strategy is essential to effectively combat these issues (Akinsooto, 2024). Based on these and the need to understand the prevalence of SGBV despite previous studies and the availability of policies in institutions, this article

aims to provide more insight and findings on the drivers of SGBV and the perpetrators of SGBV in Universities in Nigeria.

Previous studies have been conducted on the drivers of SGBV in society across the globe and Nigeria and many studies indicated socio-cultural factors as a major driver for SGBV. For instance, in many Nigerian societies, masculinity has been associated with aggression, dominance, and control, while femininity is linked to passivity and submission (Galdas, 2010). These beliefs encouraged men to assert power through violence and women who challenged these norms were often victims of violence, as seen in various cases of sexual harassment and assault on Nigerian campuses (WHO, 2013; UN Women, 2013). Similarly, studies by Courtenay (2000) and Galdas (2010) argued that adherence to these norms increased the likelihood of violent behaviour. Also, Iliyasu et. al. (2011) agreed that tertiary institutions, particularly in Nigeria, are often male-dominated environments where male behaviours and attitudes are normalised, which creates an environment where sexual harassment and exploitation of women are often overlooked.

Another driver of SGBV in institutions identified by previous studies was inadequate education and power over sexual consent. This was reflected in a study by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) that many students lacked comprehensive education about what constitutes sexual consent, leading to a distorted understanding of healthy sexual boundaries (NSVRC, 2018). In the same vein, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019) agreed that the absence of education on healthy, respectful relationships significantly contributed to SGBV because many students reported not receiving adequate education on how to build relationships based on mutual respect and consent, which increased the likelihood of abusive behaviour.

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that societal pressures and insecurities can drive female students to engage in psychological manipulation or emotional abuse to maintain power in social circles (Brown, 2003; Simmons, 2002). Additionally, many scholars agreed that many students feel uncomfortable reporting incidents of SGBV due to the lack of proper channels or fear of retaliation. According to Hart

(2018), students who experience abuse may refrain from reporting incidents due to the potential for further harm or negative consequences, including academic penalties, which creates a culture of silence, driving perpetrators to continue their behaviour without accountability. Economic hardship was also found to increase vulnerability to SGBV. Kabeer (2015) averred that economic inequality and lack of access to resources created power imbalances that made it difficult for students to escape abusive situations.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Nigeria, as explored in a study focused on Edo, Katsina, and Taraba states under the Nigeria for Women Project, is driven by economic stress, belief in male superiority, assertion of female autonomy, harmful social norms, transactional sex, sex trafficking, polygyny, harmful widowhood practices, and community and family pressures, all of which perpetuate power imbalances, cultural justifications, and economic exploitation within diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts (World Bank, 2019).

According to Ojukwu and Agu (2020), the drivers of sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria, as highlighted in the reports from the 16 Days of Activism on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (25 November – 10 December 2020), include societal norms that view domestic violence, wife battery, and assault as acceptable, law enforcement's disregard of such cases, economic pressures like family abandonment, and harmful traditional practices such as widowhood rituals, female genital mutilation, and forced and early marriages, all of which are deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and social dynamics that perpetuate power imbalances, exploitation, and discrimination.

Okolie et al. (2022) identify tradition, religion, illiteracy, gender imbalance, and poverty as the key drivers of gender-based violence in Maiduguri Metropolis, Borno State, Nigeria. Aina, Ehembi, and Fawole (2022) highlight that the fundamental drivers of sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria stem from entrenched patriarchal gender norms and the unequal distribution of power between men and women within society. According to Ojo, Daniel, Adeniyi, et al. (2023), the drivers of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) among students in

tertiary institutions in Abuja, Nigeria include traditional beliefs and practices, religious beliefs and practices, the belief in male superiority, the belief that females should obey and not argue, wearing revealing clothes, drunkenness, and peer pressure. Among these, the belief that males are superior to females and that females should obey and not argue are highlighted as the most significant causes. These drivers are rooted in gender inequality, discrimination, and deeply ingrained cultural and social norms, which perpetuate harmful behaviors and practices that justify violence against women and girls. The study emphasizes the need for educational initiatives that promote gender equality and challenge these harmful beliefs and practices.

According to the World Bank (2019), perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in a study on the rapid assessment of gender-based violence and its impact on livelihoods and women's economic empowerment in Edo, Katsina, and Taraba states include intimate partners who justify domestic violence based on societal norms of male dominance; family members who enforce harmful practices such as widowhood rites and child marriages; community and authority figures who perpetuate or fail to intervene in such practices; and peers or male students who engage in harassment and assault within educational environments. In addition, perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence, as highlighted in the reports from the 16 Days of Activism on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (25 November – 10 December 2020), include those involved in human trafficking, infanticide, and the stigmatization of survivors, all of which significantly worsen the vulnerability of women and girls, often resulting in these acts going unreported due to fear of stigma, legal inadequacies, or lack of enforcement (Ojukwu & Agu, 2020).

In understanding the perpetrators of SGBV, a study by the American Association of University Women (2015) demonstrated the prevalence of sexual harassment and exploitation by staff and faculty members in the institution. One of the central factors contributing to the abuse of power by faculty members identified was the lack of accountability because Faculty members in positions of authority feel insulated from

consequences, believing that their status and influence shield them from disciplinary actions (Dziech & Weiner, 1990). Furthermore, faculty members have been associated with “quid pro quo harassment,” with 40% of students reporting such incidents (National Women's Law Center, 2018).

Another predominant perpetrator of SGBV was male students. Research consistently showed that male students were the predominant perpetrators of sexual violence, harassment, and bullying on campuses (NSVRC, 2018). On the other hand, a study by Lane (2015) showed that students were often vulnerable to violent victimization outside the campus, particularly from strangers or acquaintances. This was affirmed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) that 11% of students reported experiencing violent victimization by community members, underscoring the broader context of risk in which students live.

Ojo et al. (2023) identify the perpetrators of gender-based violence (GBV) among students in tertiary institutions in Abuja, Nigeria, across three types of abuse: for physical abuse, the perpetrators include teachers/instructors, mothers, fellow students, fathers, friends, siblings, non-relatives, relatives, guardians, partners, stepmothers, and stepfathers; for sexual abuse, the perpetrators are non-relatives, relatives, partners, friends, lecturers, fellow students, guardians, mothers, fathers, stepfathers, siblings, and stepmothers; and for psychological abuse, the perpetrators include fellow students, teachers/instructors, friends, non-relatives, fathers, relatives, mothers, siblings, partners, guardians, stepfathers, and stepmothers.

This study seeks to understand the drivers of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within Nigerian tertiary institutions, identify and categorize the individuals or groups who perpetrate such violence, and explore the underlying dynamics that sustain its prevalence despite the presence of policies and previous scholarly interventions.

Methods

The study was sponsored by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) under the National Research Funds for 2020 with reference number Tetfund/DR&D/CE/NRF/HSS/23/Vol. It

adopted an exploratory research design and was action-oriented. The study made use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods techniques to ensure an in-depth analysis of the problem of SGBV. However, this article is from the qualitative aspects of the findings. Quantitative methods were implemented before qualitative methods, and some key informants were identified during the administration of questionnaires and the conduct of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students. The study was conducted in Enugu, Kaduna, Osun, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, encompassing public and private universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in the selected states. The selection of these states ensured geographic spread across the country, with Enugu, Kaduna, and Osun states representing the Southeast, North, and Southwest, respectively. The study included major stakeholders in tertiary education in Nigeria, such as students, student leaders, management staff, academic staff, and other key stakeholders within the higher institution sector.

The study also involved interfacing with relevant regulatory bodies, such as the Ministry of Education at the Federal and State levels, the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), and the National Board for Technical Education (NABTEB), to secure their strategic support. The multistage systematic sampling technique was used to select the respondents (students, staff, and other key stakeholders). For the quantitative data, the sum of 4,142 students was sampled from the selected higher institutions in the four locations. The sample comprised more females (3,161) than males (981), as gender-based violence is of greater concern to female students. The students were selected from various faculties in the institutions.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were held with students from various faculties. In total, 8 FGDs were conducted. Additionally, 23 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 9 in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with religious leaders, academic staff, and non-academic staff. The members of staff interviewed, totaling 18, were identified during the FGDs, and the inclusion criteria required that they must have informally supported victims of SGBV in the recent past. Descriptive analysis was employed to understand the situation

analysis of SGBV in Nigerian tertiary institutions while thematic analysis was utilized for the data with the aid of Atlas ti software.

Results

Drivers of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Tertiary Institutions

There are many factors facilitating sexual and gender-based violence in tertiary institutions, and these include academic challenges, financial constraints or poverty, environmental issues, personal attributes, accommodation challenges, and cultural beliefs, among others. Issues relating to academics include poor performance, the desire or quest for higher grades, laziness, avenues for exploitation, etc. Environmental factors predisposing students to sexual violence are dangerous locations, dark areas, and poor security. Personal attributes are also mentioned by many of the participants as a major contributory factor to sexual violence, and these include indecent dressing, carelessness, ignorance, a lack of self-control, and so on.

Poor Performance in Academics and Quest for Better Grades

Participants across the groups cited academic performance as a predisposing factor to sexual harassment of female students. (Female) Students who perform poorly in (their) academics (and desire to get better grades) are more likely to be exposed to sexual harassment. Academically weak students may be forced to engage in sexual activities against their will as another option for excelling in their academic pursuits.

Some lecturers occasionally take advantage of students who are struggling in certain courses. Some tertiary institution students are lazy, yet they desire to have good grades. The common position of the participants was that the desire to pass at all costs has exposed a high proportion of female students to sexual demands and assaults when such requests are refused. Some of the participants further mentioned cases of sexual harassment that have occurred in recent times across different institutions. For example, a Muslim leader at OAU said,

Hmm...let me say that a lot of factors may be responsible ehm, especially in an academic area like this; for students who are not particularly very intelligent

enough, those students may be exposed to this along the line. It may be between male and female lecturers. It can happen especially when you are looking for an Ok opportunity of getting more marks so that you can be able to excel in your studies that may be responsible.

Recounting an experience, a participant from the University of Abuja narrated how some lecturers would intentionally give poor grades to students who refused their sexual advances. Such students are often poor academically, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ignorant of what steps to take, and unwilling to seek redress out of fear. Another participant also mentioned how a particular lecturer would demand sex in exchange for better grades. In her words, the most victimized students are female students, and the common slogan used is “give what you have to get what you want”. Engaging in sexual activities with lecturers is a medium for using what is available to achieve good grades. During the focused group discussion, a male student at the College of Education said,

You see, because of grades and exams, some lecturers will say, 'If you do not give me this or if you do not give me what I want, I'm going to fail you.' And at the end of the day, they end up failing the student.

Cultural Beliefs Attributed to Gender

Nigeria is a patriarchal society that places men and women differently in terms of rights and privileges. This social arrangement is common across the different tribes and ethnic groups. Drawing from this social bias, the participants explained how patriarchal values and practices reinforce violence against women within and outside tertiary institutions. The belief that women should be submissive to their male counterparts, for instance, emerged dominant in the examples given across the FGDs and some of the KIIs. Many of the participants in Osun State expressed the view that cultural values and beliefs play key roles in the likelihood of deploying violence when relating to the opposite sex. A Deputy Director during the interview said, ...Generally, most ethnic groups around don't see women as equal to man/men,

very few like the Efik culture believe that a man and a woman are equal, children coming from these cultural backgrounds, inclined to be influenced by this belief.

In espousing the mentality of entitlement based on gender norms and values, an interviewee, who doubles as a Chief Security Officer in one of the institutions described how over the years, male students have exhibited a sense of entitlement in accessing the bodies of their intimate partners. The refusal to grant such gendered and unrestricted access sometimes leads to tension and violence among those involved in intimate relationships. He said,

There's usually an entitlement to me there's an entitlement mentality at times with men or boyfriends, male students who feel probably because they are going out with this person so any advance...anything I ask for she should be able to do it.

The attribution of power to control over other gender also exists in the relationships between staff and students. The Director of the Centre for Gender at UNIABUJA said some lecturers engage in sexual activities with the students under the premise of "superior versus subordinate"

Financial constraints

Poverty is a predominant cause of sexual and gender violence in tertiary institutions. Students experiencing financial struggles are more vulnerable to sexual violence. When students are not financially buoyant, they may engage in all such/manner of atrocities and female students can also seek financial help from certain people to sustain their living. This may result in sexual violence in return for financial assistance. Some of the participants averred that female students fall into the hands of predators in the course of seeking financial help. Some students become victims of rape while sourcing for financial assistance. An official at the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Osogbo said,

Well, I would want to say poverty, you see when people are poor, when you are

unable to provide the basic/necessary things for your children what do you expect? They engage in all forms of violence for example, like I said, the young ladies that are running after wealth, they run after men to sustain their living and then at the end of the day, they are being abused.

Unsafe Spaces and Inadequate Security on Campus

Unsafe spaces and the inability to adequately police all locations where students interact for academic and non-academic activities also emerged as risk factors. The consciousness that some spaces are outside the purview and control of the campus security units could be motivating those exploring such spaces for evil activities, including sexual assaults and rape. A member of an anti-sexual harassment committee described how such locations are common, yet preferred by some students who have sinister motives. She said, "There are locations on campus where illumination is poor and security personnel or surveillance are not available. Students, males, and females still patronise such locations at night and cases of rape and sexual assaults have been reported." Poorly illuminated locations are widespread across campuses of the selected institutions. The participants alluded that secluded areas are the most common places where sexual violence occurs in many tertiary institutions. Female students are mostly raped in such dangerous and isolated areas.

In addition, security personnel sometimes also constitute security risks to some students. Hostels and other residential areas around /or close to the campuses have recorded cases of sexual assaults from security personnel. A respondent in Abuja expressed how the presence of Fulani herdsmen in tertiary institutions constitutes a threat to female students. Fulani herdsmen are also allowed to live within university premises and this may be detrimental to their wellbeing and safety.

Accommodation Challenges and Off-campus Residence

Accommodation challenges also emerged as one of the risk factors triggering sexual assaults and SGBVs. Across the institutions, school

management have found it challenging to provide adequate hostels sometimes endangering the lives of female students. Some female students resort to living with males off campus when they are not offered bed spaces within the school hostel, and this sometimes results in rape or other forms of violation.

Students living off-campus are more susceptible to sexual violence compared to those residing in university-provided accommodations. This is because the level of security within the university premises is generally higher than that off-campus. The institution often struggles to ensure the safety of students outside its jurisdiction or control. The results indicated that some students become victims of rape because they are beyond the oversight and protection of the university. For example, an academic staff at UNIBUJA opined,

I stayed in a local community where residents frequently expressed concerns about the behavior of some students when school resumed. Specifically, they noted that some young men would host two, three, or even five girls at a time. While this situation may not be classified as abuse and is not directly the school's fault, it still presents a significant issue that affects the community and student welfare.

Also, some institutions are unable to demarcate the acceptable hours for visitation in university hostels. The inability to place restrictions on visiting hours may also result in sexual crimes.

Family Background and Personal Attributes of Students

Family is regarded as the first unit of socialization for students, and the background of students will determine their attitudes toward life and academics. Students who come from broken homes are more likely to experience deficiencies in certain areas, which might impact negatively on their academics.

Also, in many societies in Nigeria, emphasis is placed on the upbringing of female children to the detriment of males. This further results in moral decadence not only in tertiary institutions but in society at large.

Some participants also highlighted parental negligence as a key issue. Many parents prioritize building businesses and accumulating wealth over monitoring their children's lifestyles. This often leads to students falling into negative influences at school due to a lack of parental guidance. Some parents are too preoccupied to keep track of their children's activities, while others fail to instill strong moral values. Without proper guidance, students are more likely to develop behaviors that can be harmful to both themselves and those around them. An official at the Ministry of Education, Osun State asserted,

Regarding family background, in some cases, the father and mother may not be living together. In such situations, the lack of a cohesive parental unit can significantly impact students, particularly in terms of parental care and guidance. This deficiency often affects them as they interact and navigate life within society.

Highlighting the implications of poor parenting, participants noted that students from such backgrounds are more likely to dress indecently and be vulnerable to sexual assaults. Some participants mentioned that certain female students willingly visit lecturers in revealing clothing and behave seductively while in their offices, which may provoke sexual responses from the lecturers. Additionally, it is often believed that men are primarily influenced by visual stimuli.

According to the participants, some female students intentionally familiarize themselves with lecturers for certain reasons. Also, females sometimes make themselves objects of sex through their actions that are sometimes conceived as an act of seduction.

As the class representative, I observed that some female students would approach lecturers asking for their contact information, effectively putting themselves in potentially compromising situations. If an issue arises, they may claim harassment by the male lecturer, despite initiating the interaction. I recall one female student in my class who would engage in overly friendly behavior

with everyone, both male and female. She would often act in ways that made her vulnerable, despite attempts to advise her otherwise. When spoken to, she would insist that she was simply a free-spirited person, stating that she could choose to be independent. This type of behavior can make such students more susceptible to exploitation.

However, indecent dressing is not only applicable to the female gender. Some men are also responsible for the negative disposition of the lecturers to them. Dressing inappropriately to class may force the lecturers to misbehave towards them. Indecent dressing cannot be overemphasized as a major factor predisposing students to sexual and gender violence in many tertiary institutions across the states.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse/Addiction

Addiction to certain hard drugs or pornography can also reinforce the perpetration of sexual and gender violence in tertiary institutions. Students who are addicted to pornography are more susceptible to engaging in sexual crimes, such as rape, because they may be unable to control their urge. Students who are addicted to drugs or alcohol mostly lose control of their senses and may commit sexual crimes in the process. For example, the Chief Security Officer at one of the institutions in Abuja said,

Let me tell you, many of the boys are not responsible. The main issue is their involvement in cults and excessive drinking. When they join these groups and consume alcohol, they often lose their sense of judgment. Once intoxicated, they are unable to control themselves, which leads to violent behavior.

Students prone to drug abuse often fail to adhere to institutional rules and regulations. It is not uncommon for these students to engage in sexual crimes within academic institutions, and they are typically labeled as deviants. Additionally, some individuals make sexual violations a part of their lifestyle, sometimes seeking revenge for past abuses. Female students, under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, may either commit sexual

violations against male students or become victims themselves. Several respondents in Abuja shared that some female students are raped at events like birthday parties, freshmen gatherings, and other social functions for newly enrolled students.

Perpetrators of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

There were different categories of perpetrators of SGBV against female students and staff across all the higher institutions selected for this study. These include fellow students, lecturers, administrative staff, strangers, boyfriends, and, among staff, colleagues at work. The participants reiterated that male lecturers are the main culprits in SGBV cases, followed by male students against their fellow female students. Participants noted that lecturers often take advantage of female students, sexually harassing them in exchange for grades and academic favours. In some instances, lecturers have been known to threaten male students whom they perceive as obstacles to their relationships with female students, either because the male student is close to the lady as a friend or lover. This sometimes leads to the male student failing academically. Similarly, female students who refuse to yield to the sexual advances of some male lecturers often face the same fate. A male student in the College of Education Abuja said,

There was a lady in the same department as a young male student. The two were very close—they spent a lot of time together, did assignments together, worked together, laughed together, and shared things. One of the lecturers in the department was interested in the lady and always sought her attention, but she didn't realize this in time. When the lecturer noticed how close the guy was to the lady—who happened to be the course representative of their class—he told the guy that he would replace him as the course rep and appoint someone else because he didn't want to keep seeing his face. The lecturer even directly warned the guy to stay away from the lady and not come close to her again.

Sexual harassment among students was reported to be common across most of the institutions selected for this study. Participants and informants reported that male students sexually harassing female students was a frequent occurrence. Cases of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment of female students by their male counterparts were commonly reported. For instance, one of the security personnel at Bowen University cited an example of a male student who frequently entered the female students' restroom, pretending it was a mistake. Similarly, a case involving medical students gang-raping a female student was reported at OAU. Instances of male students bullying, intimidating, and physically assaulting their female peers were also reported across the institutions. During the interview, one of the participants at the Centre for Gender OAU said,

It is sexual harassment by male students towards female students. Recently, we handled a case that was reported to the Committee involving a group of medical students who gang-raped a female student. One of the perpetrators was about to be inducted, and while investigations were ongoing, there were pressures from the College and other quarters. Despite the circumstances, the individual was eventually inducted.

Cases of SGBV being perpetrated by strangers were also reported especially in higher institutions selected in Osun, Kaduna and FCT. The strangers mentioned include armed robbers in OAU (especially, those who reside off-campus), Fulani herdsmen in UNIABUJA and area boys in KASU. The participants noted that other people who were not known by the survivors do perpetrate sexual based violence against female students. There were other strangers such as those who assisted female students to carry loads into their hostels and raped them right there. A health worker at OAU said

“Some of the girls that I said might just be that they just landed in school and a stranger had offered to assist them with their luggage and takes them into the room and rapes them.” Students who have their accommodation outside the campus are particularly vulnerable to various kinds of SGBV, especially sexual-based violence. Participants noted that some students were raped by their family members and relatives such as siblings, uncles, cousins etc. There are also cases of neighbours raping female students who live outside higher institution campuses. Others were raped by their housemates, boyfriends or friends of the boyfriends, boyfriends of their friends and petty traders in the community they lived from whom they buy things.

There were also a few cases of administrative staff raping students, as well as boyfriends raping their girlfriends. Some students also suffered sexual assault, rape and sexual harassment from wealthy individuals who some vulnerable students run after. According to them, it is not only female students who were victims of this, some male students also run after sugar mummies and they were molested by these wealthy individuals. We even see male students running after big mummies and sugar mummies and they are being molested. During the interview, an official of the Ministry of Women's Affairs Osogbo, Osun State, said, “Some of the girls that I said it might just be that they just landed in school and a stranger had offered to assist them with their luggage and takes them into the room and rapes them.” Also, among staff, there were a few cases of superior-to-subordinate sexual harassment, as well as sexual harassment among colleagues.

Based on the study, the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are categorized into three distinct groups: perpetrators based on study location, ownership of institutions, and the types of participants or informants involved.

Perpetrators Based on Study Location

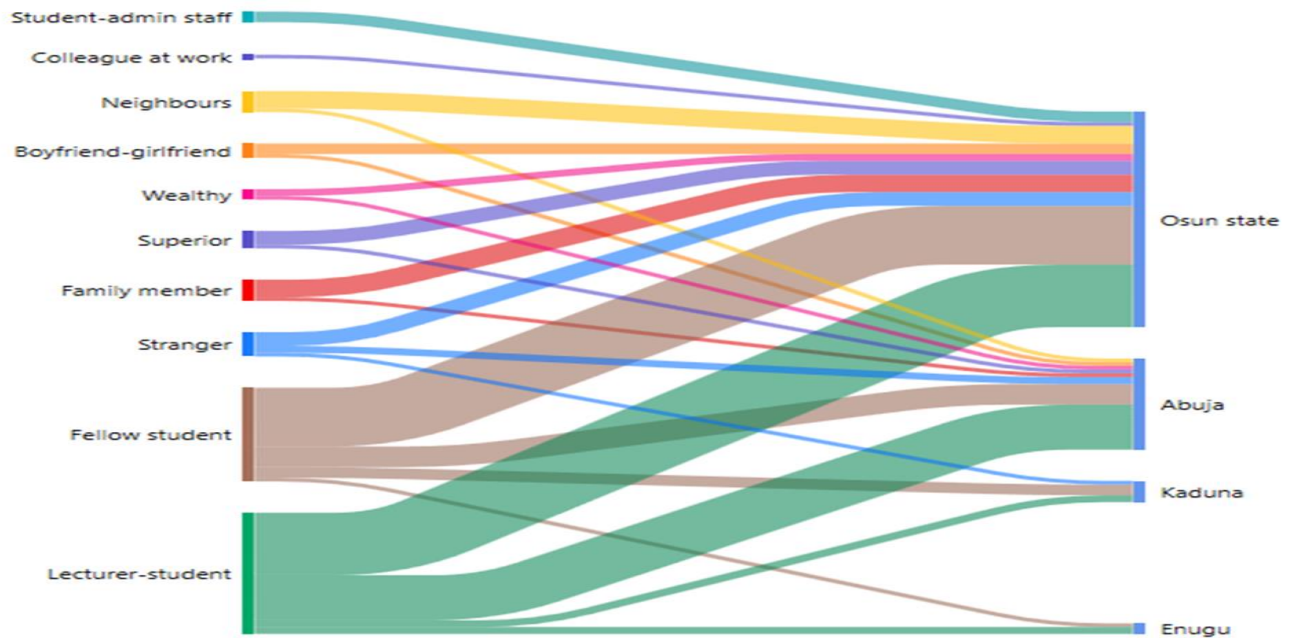


Figure 1.1: Sankey diagram, showing the perpetrators of SGBV based on the study location

Figure 1.1 represents the perpetrators based on study location, showing how different categories of perpetrators are distributed across the study locations (e.g., Osun State, Abuja, Kaduna, Enugu). The diagram visually demonstrates the relationship between the study locations and the types of perpetrators active in those areas, with the flow lines illustrating the prevalence of each category in each location. The width of the flow lines in the diagram indicates the prevalence of

specific types of perpetrators in those locations. For instance, a wider flow for a particular type of perpetrator, such as student-lecturer violence in Osun State, suggests that this form of SGBV is more prevalent in that area. Conversely, narrower flows for certain categories indicate a lower prevalence of those types of perpetrators in the respective locations. Cases of SGBV were reported more frequently in higher institutions in Osun State and the FCT than in other locations.

Perpetrators Based on the Ownership of the Ownership of Institutions

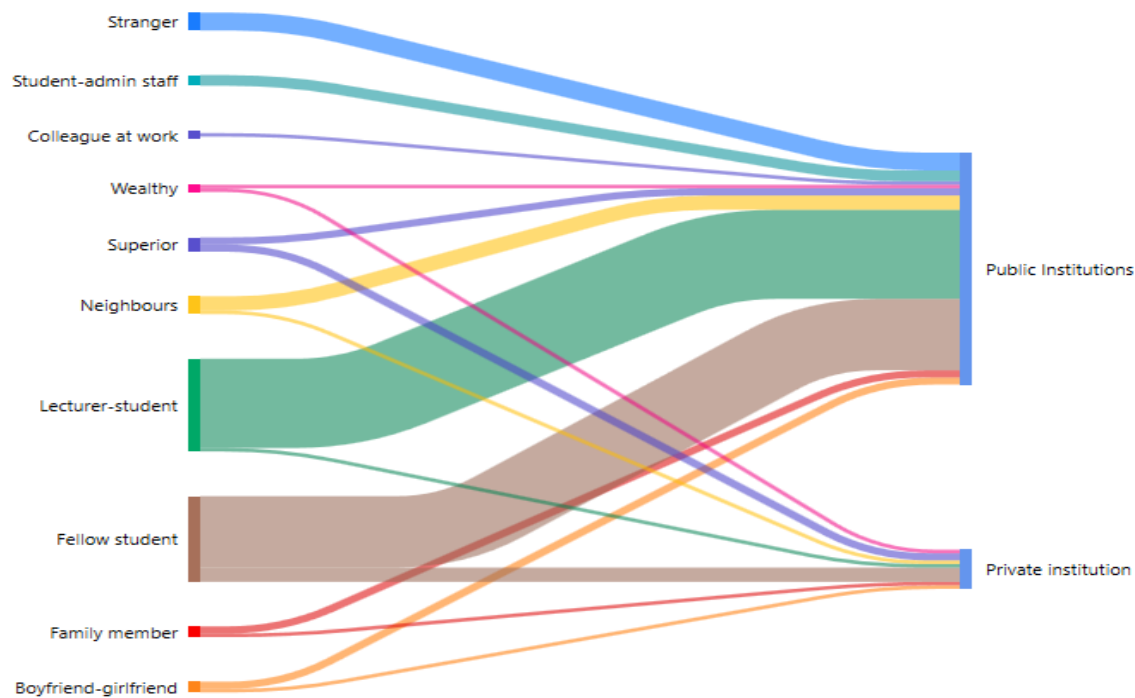


Figure 1.2 Perpetrators of SGBV based on the ownership of the institutions

Figure 1.2 represents the distribution of SGBV perpetrators across public and private educational institutions, highlighting how different categories of perpetrators are associated with each type of institution. The diagram visually demonstrates the flow of perpetrators from categories such as lecturer-student, fellow student, stranger, and family member to either public or private institutions, providing an understanding of their prevalence in each context.

The width of the flow lines in the diagram indicates the prevalence of each category of perpetrator within public or private institutions. For instance, a wider flow for the lecturer-student category in public institutions suggests that this form of SGBV is more common in that type of institution. Conversely, narrower flows for

categories like colleagues at work or wealthy individuals suggest a lower prevalence of these types of perpetrators within the respective institutions.

The diagram reveals that cases involving lecturer-student and fellow-student perpetrators are reported frequently in both public and private institutions, with public institutions showing notable occurrences involving strangers and student-admin staff. In contrast, participants reported a significant presence of family members and intimate partners (e.g., boyfriends and girlfriends) as perpetrators in private institutions, suggesting that intimate partner violence and domestic abuse may be more prevalent in these settings.

Perpetrators of SGBV Based on Different Categories of Participants/Informants

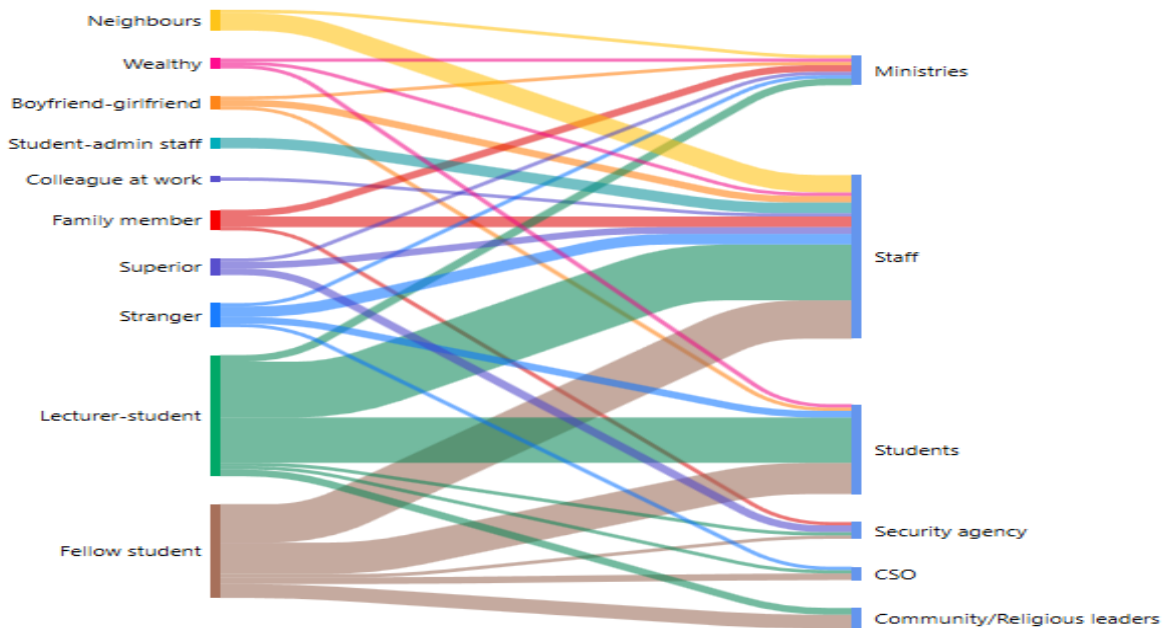


Figure 1.3: perpetrators of SGBV based on different categories of participants/informants

Figure 1.3 categorizes the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) based on the reports provided by different groups of participants/informants, including ministry officials, members of CSOs, staff of tertiary institutions, security agencies, and community and religious leaders. The diagram illustrates how these participant groups identified various categories of perpetrators, such as neighbours, family members, lecturer-student, and colleagues at work, and links them to corresponding recipient entities such as ministries, staff, students, and community leaders.

The flow lines in the diagram indicate the prevalence of each perpetrator category as reported by the informants, with wider flows

suggesting higher mentions or significance. For example, a substantial flow from the 'family member' category toward 'staff' and 'community/religious leaders' implies a significant acknowledgment of these perpetrators within these groups. Narrower flows, such as those from 'wealthy individuals' or 'student-admin staff,' suggest fewer mentions by the participants.

This visual representation helps to contextualise which perpetrator categories are more frequently highlighted by each type of informant, shedding light on the dynamics of SGBV as perceived and reported by ministry officials, CSO members, and other key stakeholders.

Table 1.1: Categorization of Perpetrators of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Category	Perpetrator	Type of SGBV	Example Context
Authority Figures or Power-Abusing Perpetrators	Student-Admin Staff, Lecturer-Student	Abuse of power, Sexual harassment, Coercion	Educational settings where staff or lecturers exploit their authority over students
	Colleague at Work (Superior-Subordinate)	Sexual harassment, Quid pro quo harassment, Coercion	Workplace environments where supervisors abuse their power over subordinates
2. Intimate Partner or Peer-Based Perpetrators	Boyfriend-Girlfriend, Fellow Student	Intimate partner violence, Sexual violence, Emotional abuse, Coercion	Romantic or peer relationships with abuse and control dynamics
3. Workplace and Economic Exploitation Perpetrators	Wealthy	Economic abuse, Exploitation, Human trafficking, Sexual exploitation	Perpetrators using economic power to manipulate or exploit individuals
4. Community and Social Perpetrators	Neighbours, Stranger	Sexual assault, Harassment, Coercion, Human trafficking	Community or public settings where strangers or neighbors commit random acts of violence
5. Familial Perpetrators (Domestic Violence)	Family Member	Domestic violence, Child abuse, Elder abuse, Incest, Sexual exploitation	Violence or abuse perpetrated within the family (spouses, parents, relatives)

Source: Field Data 2025

Table 1.1 presents a breakdown formed from the categorization of perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the three Sankey diagrams (Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), which classify the perpetrators based on study location, institutional ownership, and groups of participants/informants, respectively. The table categorizes these perpetrators into distinct groups, which include authority figures, intimate partners or peers, economic exploiters, community or social perpetrators, and familial perpetrators. Each group reflects distinct patterns of abuse: authority figures are typically those in positions of power; intimate partners and peers are involved in personal or social relationships; economic exploiters are linked to financial dependence or exploitation; community or social perpetrators represent broader social dynamics; and familial perpetrators encompass those within

family or close-knit relationships. Understanding these categories is essential for grasping the various contexts in which SGBV occurs, as well as the power dynamics that often drive these violent acts.

The first category, authority figures or power-abusing perpetrators, includes perpetrators such as student-admin staff and lecturer-student relationships. In these cases, the perpetrators abuse their positions of authority to exploit vulnerable individuals. This abuse may manifest as sexual harassment, coercion, or exploitation, in educational settings. For example, a lecturer might demand sexual favours in exchange for academic rewards, such as good grades, or an administrative staff member may take advantage of their position to harass students. These dynamics stem from an imbalance of power,

where the perpetrator feels entitled to abuse their authority over the victim.

The second category, intimate partner or peer-based perpetrators, refers to situations where SGBV occurs between individuals in intimate or peer relationships. These perpetrators are typically boyfriends, girlfriends, or fellow students who perpetrate intimate partner violence or sexual violence. The violence can range from physical abuse to emotional manipulation, sexual assault, and coercion. Such abuse often stems from control, jealousy, or power struggles within the relationship. In peer-based situations, violence can also be exacerbated by the need for dominance or submission in the social group.

The third category, workplace, and economic exploitation perpetrators includes individuals with significant economic or social power, such as the wealthy. These perpetrators often use their economic status to exploit or manipulate others, engaging in acts of economic abuse, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. Wealthy individuals may leverage their financial resources to control the lives of vulnerable individuals, coercing them into situations where they are sexually exploited or economically dependent. These acts of exploitation often take place in environments where the victim has limited access to support or resources, making it difficult for them to escape the abuse.

The fourth category, community, and social perpetrators highlights the role of neighbours and strangers in perpetrating SGBV. In these cases, the perpetrators may commit acts of sexual assault, harassment, or coercion, with some even engaging in human trafficking. This type of violence occurs in public or community spaces, where perpetrators take advantage of their proximity to the victim. Neighbors may use their closeness to carry out harassment, while strangers may perpetrate random acts of violence such as rape or assault. These acts often occur in situations where the victim feels a false sense of security, either within their community or because of the anonymity of the perpetrator.

Finally, the familial perpetrators (domestic violence) category involves abuse that takes place within the family unit. Family members, including parents, spouses, or other relatives, may engage in various forms of domestic violence, including child abuse, incest, and elder

abuse. This type of violence often stems from the false sense of safety that family relationships provide. For example, a spouse may abuse their partner, or a parent may sexually abuse their child, exploiting their familial bond to perpetuate violence and control.

In summary, the table illustrates the various dynamics and contexts in which SGBV occurs, drawing attention to the significant role power and relationship structures play in perpetuating violence. By understanding these categories, it becomes clear that interventions need to be tailored to specific types of relationships and social settings to effectively address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

Discussion

This article explored the facilitators of sexual and gender-based violence in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that SGBV was widespread, with reported cases across all the institutions visited. The study categorized the facilitators of SGBV into personal, structural, and environmental factors. Personal factors are related to the individual students and staff of these institutions and include financial difficulties, poor academic performance, and the desire for better grades on the part of the students. Structural factors such as unsafe spaces, and inadequate security arrangements within/on campus and students' residences, have been identified as drivers of SGBV. Other drivers include the family background and personal attributes of students, as well as alcohol and substance use. Environmental factors that contribute to SGBV include cultural beliefs and gender-related attributes. Facilitators of SGBV also include academic and non-academic staff, family members, strangers, and neighbours of students living outside campus. That SGBV in higher education institutions appears in multiple forms corroborates the findings of Linus et al. (2023), while physical violence was the most prevalent in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

A significant percentage of female students experienced physical and sexual violence which encompasses non-consensual sexual acts such as rape, sexual harassment, and exploitation. The study findings also corroborated with Iliyasu et al. (2011), which indicated that the majority of

female students in a University in Nigeria reported experiencing sexual violence, emotional abuse, psychological violence, and economic control, as a form of SGBV. However, in more recent developments, the degree of perpetration of SGBV against young women has been reinforced by Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). For instance, according to UNFPA, (2022), 85% of women reported witnessing online violence, and nearly 40% have experienced it personally. This may come in the form of online abuse and sexual exploitation such as cyber-stalking, non-consensual image-based abuse, cyberbullying, doxing, and cyber-grooming. Aside from making the teaching and learning environment unconducive for many students, especially females, the surge in technology-induced GBV/TFGBV in Nigeria's higher institutions has led to a declaration of a GBV pandemic in the country in 2020.

In addition, the study has shown that the facilitators of SGBV in Nigerian tertiary institutions are multifaceted, ranging from socio-cultural factors to institutional weaknesses. For instance, patriarchal attitudes often reinforce gender inequalities and the acceptance of violence against women. This is in line with the findings of Adeyinka (2015) and Okeke (2016). In tertiary institutions, such beliefs often manifest in power dynamics where male lecturers and students exploit their positions of authority over their female counterparts. Economically, an important finding is that the economic status of the survivors places them in disadvantaged positions. For instance, students residing off-campus, especially those who could not afford accommodation in more urban and secure areas, students with disabilities, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds were identified to be particularly vulnerable to SGBV corroborating Crenshaw, (1991; Ikuteyijo, et al, 2023). The study also found that institutional policies in the form of space management were part of the facilitators of SGBV in tertiary institutions. Ungoverned spaces denote areas within educational institutions where the security of lives and property cannot be guaranteed. This was evident in some institutions where students had been reportedly raped and harassed by strangers and other perpetrators. Infrastructural

decay has resulted in the vulnerability of some institutions as a result, facilities such as lightning, and monitoring of such spaces have become challenging.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study findings showed that the facilitators of SGBV include personal, structural, and environmental factors. While personal factors are related to the individual students and staff of these institutions and include financial difficulties, poor academic performance, and the desire for better grades on the part of the students, structural factors are inherent in the institutions and they include unsafe spaces, and inadequate security arrangements within/on campus and students' residences. Environmental factors on the other hand include cultural beliefs and gender-related attributes. The scourge of SGBV in higher institutions of learning is detrimental to the overall development of any society. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to identify and mitigate the facilitators of SGBV in all institutions of higher learning. The study concluded that the prevalence of SGBV will hinder the achievement of the laudable SDGs 5 and 10, hence the need for deliberate plans and actions becomes necessary to end it.

The following recommendations emanated from the study:

1. Sensitization programs are to be initiated across all schools to enlighten students about the high-risk behaviours of SGBV
2. The establishment of a reporting system on the perpetration of SGBV across universities and other tertiary institutions.
3. Empowerment programs for vulnerable students especially female students
4. Rehabilitation programs for survivors of SGBV in schools across the country
5. Establishment of an inter-agency committee on SGBV to provide support for the implementation of relevant policy documents across states
6. Employment of more counselors and psychologists in schools to allow survivors with post-traumatic experiences of SGBV to access aids

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Acknowledgement

The authors will like to appreciate and acknowledge the generous support of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) for providing funding through the National Research Fund (TETFund/DR&D/CE/NRF/HSS/23/Vol.1).