RISK COMMUNICATION IN ADDRESSING SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Dr. Umar Maimuna Rabo
Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education and Extension Services,
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto
Email: maimunarabo2013@gmail.com, maimuna.rabo@udusok.edu.ng

ABSTRACT
This paper defined the concept of risk communication in addressing sexual and gender based violence. It examined the causes of sexual and gender based violence against women which include norms granting male control over female behavior, accepting violence as a way of resolving conflict. The paper also talks about the effect of sexual and gender based violence such as the effect on women's health, economic and social impact. The paper suggested some measures to consider in addressing menace such as health care services, victim assistance services, legal responses, education and so on. Conclusively the root cause of sexual and gender based violence lied in unequal power relations between men and women, a variety of factors at the individual level, family level, the level of community and society at large.

INTRODUCTION
Risk communication used to be viewed primarily as the dissemination of information to the public about health risks and events, such as outbreaks of disease and instructions on how to change behavior to mitigate those risks. Thinking on this has now evolved dramatically as social science evidence and new communication and media technologies and practices have evolved in the 21st century (Gaya, 2013). Today, risk communication is recognised as the two-way and multi-directional communications and engagement with affected populations so that they can take informed decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones. It can and should utilise the most appropriate and trusted of channels of communication and engagement. It needs to bring together a diverse range of expertise in the field of communication, social sciences (mass media, emergency and crisis communication, social media, health education, health promotion, communication for behaviour change, etc) and systems strengthening techniques in order to achieve public health goals in emergencies (WHO, 2009). This bring about the issue of risk

communication in addressing sexual and gender based violence in our community.

Gender is a socially constructed definition of men and women. It is not thesame as sex (biological characteristics of men and women) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to men and women inthe society. Example of gender is referring to someone who wears a dress as a female or a female mechanic or engineer.Sexual and gender based violence is a profound human right violation with major social and developmental impacts for survivors of violence as well as their families, communities and society more broadly. On an individual level , sexual and gender based violence leads to psychological, behavioural and physical consequences for survivors. The principal characteristic of sexual and gender-based violence is that it occurs against women precisely because of their gender. Gender-based violence involves power imbalances where, most often, men are the perpetrators and women the victims. During this session we will explore in detail the causes and contributing factors of gender-based violence, various effects of gender-based violence on victims and their families, perpetrators and the society as a whole, as well as examine a variety of possible social responses to the phenomenon.

Justifications for violence frequently are on based gender norms that is, social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women. These cultural and social norms socialize males to be aggressive, powerful, unemotional, and controlling, and contribute to a social acceptance of men as dominant. Similarly, expectations of females as passive, nurturing, submissive, and emotional also reinforce women's roles as weak, powerless, and dependent upon men. The socialization of both men and women has resulted in an unequal power relationship between men and women. According to the International Labor Organization in general, the orientation of a culture, or the shared beliefs within a sub-culture, helps define the limits of tolerable behavior. To the extent that a society values violence, attaches prestige to violent conduct, or defines violence as normal or legitimate or functional behavior, the values of individuals within that society will develop accordingly. Attitudes of gender inequality are deeply embedded in many cultures and rape, domestic assault and sexual harassment can all be viewed as a violent expression of the cultural norm.(Chapell. and Martino, 1998).There are

many myths about sexual and gender-based violence that attempt to explain or justify it. Common myths include:
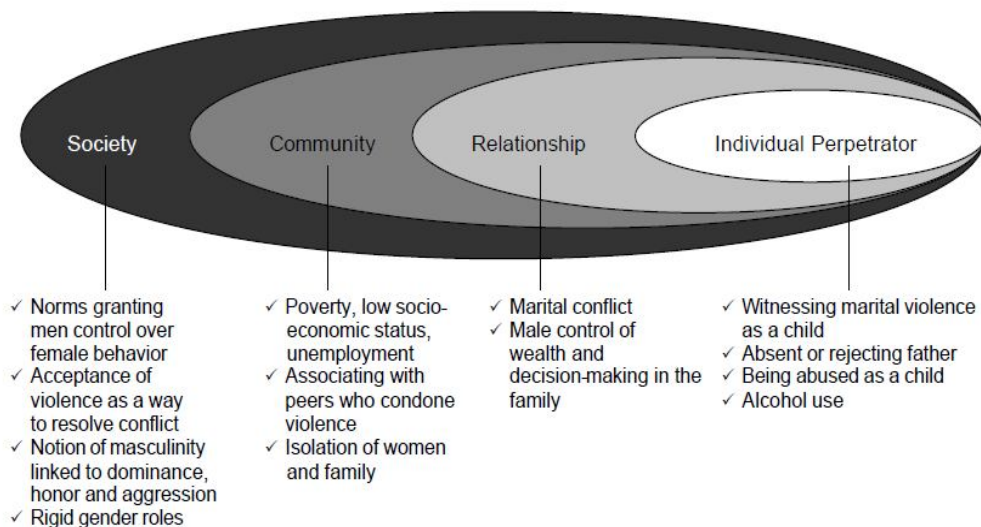
- The perpetrators of violence are a minority group of mentally ill men;
- Poverty or war lead to attacks on and abuse of women;
- Violence against women is caused by substance abuse, such as drugs and alcohol;
- Violence against women is an inevitable part of male-female relations;
- Violence against women is an inherent part of maleness, or a natural expression of male sexual urges.

Such views lead to a perception that sexual and gender-based violence is rare or exceptional, and/or that it is caused by factors outside of men's control. They place onus on women to ensure that they minimize the chances of their behavior instigating violence.

Causes of sexual and gender based violence against women?

Increasingly, researchers are using an "ecological framework" to understand the interplay of personal, situational, and socio-cultural factors that combine to cause sexual and sexual and gender-based violence which are in this model, violence against women results from the interaction of factors at different levels of social environment.

Ecological model of factors associated with SGBV

Society	Community	Relationship	Individual Perpetrator
✓ Norms granting men control over female behavior ✓ Acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict ✓ Notion of masculinity linked to dominance, honor and aggression ✓ Rigid gender roles	✓ Poverty, low socio-economic status, unemployment ✓ Associating with peers who condone violence ✓ Isolation of women and family	✓ Marital conflict ✓ Male control of wealth and decision-making in the family	✓ Witnessing marital violence as a child ✓ Absent or rejecting father ✓ Being abused as a child ✓ Alcohol use

The model can best be visualized as four concentric circles. The innermost circle represents the biological and personal history that affects an individual's behavior in his/her relationships. The second circle represents the immediate context in which sexual and gender-based violence takes place- frequently, the family or other intimate or acquaintance relationship. The third circle represents the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal, in which relationships are embedded- neighborhood, workplace, social networks, and peer groups. The fourth, outermost circle is the economic and social environment, including cultural norms. A wide range of studies suggest that several factors at each of these levels, while not the sole cause, but may increase the likelihood of sexual and gender-based violence occurring(Pan American Health Org. 2003).

- At the *individual level* these factors include the perpetrator being abused as a child or witnessing marital violence in the home, having an absent or rejecting father, and frequent use of alcohol.
- At the *level of the family and relationship*, cross-cultural studies have cited male control of wealth and decision-making within the family and marital conflict as strong predictors of abuse.
- At the *community level* women's isolation and lack of social support, together with male peer groups that condone and legitimize men's violence, predict higher rates of violence.
- At the *societal level* studies around the world have found that violence against women is most common where gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced and where the concept of masculinity is linked to toughness, male honor, or dominance. Other cultural norms associated with abuse include tolerance of physical punishment of women and children, acceptance of violence as a means to settle interpersonal disputes, and the perception that men have "ownership" of women.

An ecological approach to sexual and gender-based violence argues that no one factor alone "causes" violence but rather that a number of factors combine to raise the likelihood that a particular man in a particular setting may act violently toward a woman. In the ecological framework, social and cultural norms-such as those that assert men's inherent superiority over women combine with individual-level factors such as whether a man was abused himself as a child to determine the likelihood of sexual and

gender-based violence. The more risk factors present, the higher the likelihood of violence(Pan American Health Org. 2003).

It is important to remember that psychological explanations for sexual and gender-based violence (i. e. witnessing marital violence as a child, having an absent or rejecting father, or being abused as a child) often fail to appreciate the role of wider inequalities in the relations between women and men, and the need to transform these. It is not simply the case that if one sees or experiences violence as a child, one will in turn abuse others. Studies emphasize that girls are three to six times more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys, yet the vast majority of sexual abuse is perpetrated by male, not female, adults (Francine, 2001). At the other extreme, the explanation of violence against women solely as the result of men's experience of external factors (i. e. poverty, conflict, rapid economic or political change), fails to take into account that sexual and gender-based violence cuts across socio-economic boundaries. While evidence from women themselves in many different contexts indicates that poverty and crisis exacerbate violence against women, in particular domestic violence, poverty is not in itself the cause of violence against women. Rather, it is one of main factors that may aggravate or increase the violence that already exists. The fact that not all men in poor households are violent indicates that poverty is an insufficient explanation of violence. Exaggerating the role of poverty, in fact, negates people's agency in making choices about the way they react to factors outside of their control.

Likewise, conflict and rapid social or economic change affect the extent of sexual and gender-based violence in a society, but they do not cause it. Existing rates of violence against women do often increase during times of social instability, and new patterns of abuse can be triggered. Situations like men's unemployment and women's entry into the workforce during times of economic restructuring, or the lack of opportunities for demobilized soldiers after a war, may pose a challenge to men's sense of themselves as powerful. In contexts where individual men feel their sense of masculinity and power is threatened, sexual and gender-based violence is condoned in law or in custom, such violence may increase in intensity and frequency, as men struggle to maintain a sense of power and control. The gender perspective on violence against women shows us that the root cause of violence lies in the unequal power relations between women and men, which ensure male dominance over women, and are a characteristic

of human societies throughout the world(Pickup, Williams, Sweet man, 2001).

Exploring Effects of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Outlook, (2003), while women are usually the immediate victims of gender violence, the consequences of gender violence extend beyond the victim to the society as a whole. Gender violence threatens family structures; children suffer emotional damage when they watch their mothers and sisters being battered; two-parent homes may break up, leaving the new female heads of household to struggle against increased poverty and negative social repercussions. Psychological scars often impede the establishment of healthy and rewarding relationship in the future. Victims of gender violence may vent their frustrations on their children and others. Thereby transmitting and intensifying the negative experiences of those around them. Children On the other hand may come to accept violence as an alternative means of conflict resolution and communication. It is in these ways that violence is reproduced and perpetuated. The effects of violence on women vary widely. It depends on the nature of the particular incident, the woman's relationship with her abuser, and the context in which it took place. Sexual and Gender-based violence typically has physical, psychological, and social effects. For the survivors, these are interconnected, which include:

- Impact on women's health which include physical and psychological.
- Economic and social impact on women
- Impact on women's family and dependants.
- Impact on the perpetrator of violence
- Impact on the society

Impact on women's health:

Gender-based violence has been linked to many serious health problems, both immediate and long-term. These include physical and psychological health problems:

- **Physical**
  - injury,
  - disability,
  - chronic health problems (irritable bowel syndrome, gastrointestinal disorders, various chronic pain syndromes, hypertension, etc.)

> ➢ sexual and reproductive health problems (contracting sexually transmitted diseases, spread of HIV/AIDS, high-risk pregnancies, etc.)
> ➢ death

- **Psychological**

Effects can be both direct/ indirect
> ➢ **Direct:** anxiety, fear, mistrust of others, inability to concentrate, loneliness, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, etc.
> ➢ **Indirect:** psychosomatic illnesses, withdrawal, alcohol or drug use.

- **Economic and social impact:**
> ➢ Rejection, ostracism and social stigma at community level;
> ➢ Reduced ability to participate in social and economic activities;
> ➢ Acute fear of future violence, which extends beyond the individual survivors to other members in community;
> ➢ Damage to women's confidence resulting in fear of venturing into public spaces (this can often curtail women's education, which in turn can limit their income-generating opportunities);
> ➢ Increased vulnerability to other types of gender-based violence;
> ➢ Job loss due to absenteeism as a result of violence;
> ➢ Negative impact on women's income generating power (Outlook, 2003)

- **The impact on women's family and dependants:**
  Direct effects:
> ➢ divorce, or broken families;
> ➢ jeopardized family's economic and emotional development
> ➢ babies born with health disorders as a result of violence experienced by the mother during pregnancy (i.e. premature birth or low birth weight);
> ➢ increased likelihood of violence against children growing up in households where there is domestic violence;
> ➢ collateral effects on children who witness violence at home (emotional and behavioral
> disturbances, e.g. withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, self-blame, aggression against peers, family members, and property; increased risk of growing up to be either a perpetrator or a victim of violence)

Indirect effects:

➢ Compromised ability of survivor to care for her children (e.g. child malnutrition and neglect due to constraining effect of violence on women's livelihood strategies and their bargaining position in marriage)

➢ Ambivalent or negative attitudes of a rape survivor towards the resulting child (Outlook, 2003)

- **The impact of violence on the perpetrators:**

➢ sanctioning by community, facing arrest and imprisonment;

➢ legal restrictions on seeing their families, divorce, or the break up of their families;

➢ feeling of alienation from their families;

➢ minimizing the significance of violence for which they are responsible; deflecting the responsibility for violence onto their partner and failure to associate it with their relationship;

➢ increased tension in the home

- **The impact of violence on society:**

➢ burden on health and judicial systems

➢ hindrance to economic stability and growth through women's lost productivity

➢ hindrance to women's participation in the development processes and lessening of their contribution to social and economic development.

➢ constrained ability of women to respond to rapid social, political, or economic change.

➢ breakdown of trust in social relationships

➢ Weakened support networks on which people's survival strategies depend.

➢ strained and fragmented networks that are of vital importance in strengthening the capabilities of communities in times of stress and upheaval (Outlook, 2003)

Measures to be consider in addressing sexual and gender based violence

Over the last few decades, sexual and gender-based violence has been recognized and discussed as a public, rather than a private problem. As a result, a multitude of potential responses has been identified within the state and civil society.

There is a variety of approaches to sexual and gender-based violence (i.e. human rights, health, and development) and they are being integrated to address the problem. Through participation of multiple sectors and entire communities in addressing gender-based violence, it is possible to achieve effective prevention and create social networks with ensure that victims of gender-based violence receive the care and protection they need.

The Pan American Health Organization points out that creating these networks involves integrating sexual and gender-based violence prevention and care into existing systems and services, as well as designing new responses. Social responses to sexual and gender-based violence fall under several categories:

- health care services
- victim assistance services
- working with perpetrators
- exploring masculinities
- media information and awareness campaigns
- education
- legal responses
- community interventions
- faith-based programs
- international conferences and conventions

Health Care - Training health care providers to recognize and respond to sexual and gender-based violence is one of the most important ways of identifying and assisting victims. Not just obstetrician/gynecologists but all health care professionals must learn to recognize the signs: hospitals (especially emergency room staff); public and private health clinic staff; general/family practitioners; internists; pediatricians; psychiatrists; nurses and the staff of family planning clinics (Outlook, 2003).

Victim Assistance Services - These are services created or incorporated to respond to gender-based violence, such as: battered women shelters; homeless shelters; financial assistance programs; women's police stations or services; victim advocacy programs; rape crisis, domestic violence and suicide prevention hotlines; legal services; runaway programs; social welfare programs; psychological support services (including individual

counseling and support groups) and teen sexuality programs/health services.

Support Groups - While support groups can fall under the heading of victim assistance services, they merit special mention because they are not always externally organized services. Support groups can be a important way for victims themselves to organize pro-actively and take charge of their own situation. Beyond emotional support, group members can also provide one another with a sense of security and even, if needed, a place to go (Outlook, 2003).

Working with Perpetrators - Working with the perpetrators of violence (batterer-intervention programs) has been a controversial and occasionally successful response. While victim assistance services are a useful band aid to address an existing problem, this approach targets efforts at the source of the problem, attempting to change violent men's behavior (Outlook, 2003).

Exploring Masculinities - Programs which address masculinities attempt to explore what "makes a man". The central idea is to educate boys from the earliest age that violence (against anyone) is wrong, that the prevailing definition of masculinity in any society is not the only alternative, and that even though they are physically different, girls are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as men (Outlook, 2003).

Media Information and Awareness Campaigns - The media is a key conduit for making SGBV visible, advertising solutions, informing policy-makers and educating the public about legal rights and how to recognize and address SGBV. Newspapers, magazines, newsletters, radio, television, the music industry, film, theatre, advertising, the internet, posters, leaflets, community notice boards, libraries and direct mail are all channels for providing information to victims and the general public about SGBV prevention and available services.

Education - School systems are instrumental to stopping SGBV before it starts. Regular curricula, sexuality education, school counseling programs and school health services can all convey the message that violence is wrong and can be prevented, suggest alternative models of masculinity, teach conflict-resolution skills and provide assistance to children/adolescents who may be victims or perpetrators of violence.

Integrating SGBV as a subject into psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing, law, women's studies, social work and other programs enables providers to identify and tend to this problem (Outlook, 2003).

Faith-Based Programs and Services - Religious counseling, support groups, education programs, study groups and assistance programs can address SGBV with their participants/worshippers. Most religions emphasize the importance of peace and tolerance. Framing a discussion of SGBV in the context of religious tenets is one way to foster awareness and discussion of the problem. It may also be a way to identify and assist victims who do not feel comfortable talking to a health care provider or police officer.

Legal Responses - The criminalization of all forms of SGBV - domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, psychological violence etc. has been an important step in eliminating it. What remains is the consistent application of these laws, the implementation of penalties, and a greater focus on rehabilitating convicted perpetrators. Other legal responses to SGBV have included: legal aid services; training of police and judicial personnel; women's police stations; legal advocacy and lobbying; training of family, criminal, immigration and juvenile court lawyers and bar association advocacy (Outlock, 2003)

International Conferences and Conventions - The international community has come together to address sexual and gender-based violence through a variety of conferences, conventions and agreements. Though these do not have the same binding force as domestic law, international conventions such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women can be demonstrative of a state's willingness to acknowledge the problem of SGBV and seek solutions. International conventions also hold states accountable to an international and externally monitored standard. International conferences on SGBV bring together groups and actors from all over the world, giving them the opportunity to share their own experiences, and learn from others.

Community Networks and Interventions - A number of studies have shown that involving entire communities in recognizing, addressing and working to prevent SGBV is one of the surest ways of eliminating it. To be optimally effective, community networks must bring together all of he responses outlined above, integrating members from all sectors of the

community: families; businesses; advocacy groups/civil society; public services such as police, fire fighters and medical examiners; social services such as welfare, unemployment, public housing and health; education; the media and officials from national, state/provincial and local/municipal governments. Community interventions must send a clear message about what sexual land gender-based violence is, the different forms it can take, why it is wrong and how to prevent it (Outlook, 2003)

CONCLUSION

The root cause of sexual and gender-based violence lied in unequal power relations between women and men. However, a variety of factors on the individual level, the family level, and at the level of community and society, often combine to raise the likelihood of violence occurring. The effects of sexual and gender-based violence are far-reaching and extend beyond the individual survivor, to the family and society as a whole. Potential measures against sexual and gender-based violence are most effective when there is a common understanding of the nature and causes of sexual and gender-based violence and it is addressed from all angles, through the participation of multiple sectors and entire communities.

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