

When Help Turns Awry: Assessing how Social Media Re-victimize Victims of Sexual Violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined how social networking sites re-victimized female victims of sexual violence in Nigeria. It adopted descriptive survey design. Focus group discussions and personal interviews were used to gather data for the study. Eight students of Mass Communication at Renaissance University were selected for the focus group discussions using the quota sampling technique, while 10 female victims of sexual violence in Nigeria whose stories were published in the social media were purposively selected for the personal interviews. The study found that the social media re-victimized victims of sexual violence in Nigeria in many ways, including exaggerating their stories, sharing their nude pictures, blaming them, using fake pictures to share their stories and sharing their stories without their consent. The study also investigated the survival strategies adopted by victims of sexual assaults in Nigeria and measures to prevent re-victimization of female victims of sexual violence by social media in Nigeria.

Keywords: *.Social media .Re-victimization .Victims .Sexual violence*

Introduction

Social media networking has permeated every facet of life in Nigeria. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and other social networking sites are very popular in Nigeria. Such sites are commonly used for public and private communications. The ubiquity of the social networking sites in Nigeria is enhanced by non existence of any form of regulation. People are at liberty to post whatever they want to post, not minding any ethical considerations or the taste of such posts. Although the credibility of the social networking sites as sources of information is often questioned, many Nigerians, especially the youth, seem to prefer sourcing and sharing their news in the social media. This development has boosted citizen journalism in Nigeria, with all its trappings and vices.

Social networking sites are used by people for various reasons. Such uses include making new friends, connecting with old friends, keeping in touch with family members, sharing photos, entertainment, education/academics, business, political mobilization, social mobilization, dating and sports (Adaja, 2013; Alakali, Akpan & Tarnongo, 2013; Akpan, Akwaowo & Senann, 2013; Ezumah, 2013). Apart from these positive uses, social media sites are used for negative purposes. The National White Collar Crime Center (2011, p.3) observes that "the prevalence of criminal activity on social media sites is difficult to determine. In fact, there are currently no comprehensive statistics on social media crimes. This can be due to a number of factors, especially considering the broad nature of social media, anonymity afforded to criminals, and relative unawareness of internet users, which can create ripe environment for victimization."

One popular feature of social media communication in Nigeria is discussion of sexual violence, especially sexual assaults on women. Such cases include rape, gang rape, and sexual exploitation of minors/defilement. Social media in Nigeria are awash with pictures and stories of victims of sexual violence. Some of the pictures show the victims stack

naked while others display some sensitive parts of the victims in ways that can offend public sensitivities.

Sexual offenses against women have dominated social media discussions in Nigeria for a long time. One observation about this is that none of the cases dies easily, if it ever dies. The implication is that once a victim's case is taken to the social media in Nigeria, it remains there for a long time. In fact, how long it lasts in the social media cannot be predicted. This is because the case will be exhumed when a similar incident happens. Again, some Nigerian social media users mark anniversaries of such assaults. The case of one Cynthia Osokogwu who was allegedly sexually assaulted and murdered by her Facebook friends is often mentioned when new sexual assault cases are discussed by Nigerian social media users.

Every case of sexual assault published in the social media attracts wide range reactions. Nothing seems to attract more reactions in social media in Nigeria than sexual assaults on women. Nigerian social media users spend quality time to discuss, condemn, criticize such incidents and share the posts. But it should be noted that there are some who engage in victim-blaming. They blame the victims for what they did or did not do; how they dressed or did not dress and how they moved or did not move. Teens are mostly the victims of sexual assaults and social media re-victimization in Nigeria. Donovan (2011, p.2) observes that "date rape and acquaintance rape have long been issues in the adolescent culture, but now teens who are sexually assaulted by a boy friend or acquaintance can find themselves re-victimized courtesy of cell phones and social network when their abusers brag online or forward degrading pictures to classmates." Donovan further states that "victimization becomes a form of entertainment, amusement, or revenge for the abusers and for anyone else roaming the social network (which can be hundreds to thousands of views)."

One of the cases of sexual assaults against women in Nigeria that went viral in the social media was the alleged abduction and forceful marriage of a 13-year old girl, Ese Rita Oruru, by one Yunusa Dahiru. The alleged abduction took place on 12 August, 2015 at her mother's shop in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. She was not released until 29th February, 2016. During the period, the social media sites were awash with her story. The protests were fueled by the allegations that she was raped, forcefully Islamized and married off in the palace of the Emir of Kano, without her parents' consent. By the time she was released, she was five months pregnant. This caused outrage in the social media sites. Her stories and pictures were and are still everywhere in the social media, because the case is yet to end.

Another sexual assault case that shook the social media in Nigeria was the case of 15-year old girl, Miss Uzoamaka Chukwu, from Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Uzoamaka, was allegedly stripped naked by the coordinator of a development centre and his siblings in the presence of some policemen in July 2016. The nude pictures of the poor orphan were taken by her attackers and posted in the social media. The alleged involvement of a government official and policemen in the case made it a hot topic in the social media. Uzoamaka's nude pictures are still in the internet for every interested person to see.

The abduction of over 200 secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State in Northeast Nigeria in 2014 by the Boko Haram sect appears to be the "mother" of all cases of social media portrayal of victims of sexual violence. The case seems to have been politicized with some questioning the report and claiming that no student was abducted in Chibok. But the pictures of the abducted girls and their parents have been trending in the social media. Mixed reactions have trailed their ordeals with consoling and devastating comments and posts in the social media. There have been reports that some of the girls who escaped from Boko Haram captivity are called "Boko Haram Wives" by their peers and some other community members. In fact, the Bring Back Our Girls campaigners have criticized the social media and the main stream media for calling some captured Boko

Haram insurgents husbands of their rescued victims. The reports of some women rescued from Boko Haram captivity wanting to go back to their captivity may not be unconnected with the social stigma they may face if they return to their families.

Given that victims of sexual violence are members of the society, have their social contacts, ties, privacy and reputation to protect, can unending, uncontrollable exposure, circulation and discussion of their ordeals in the social media re-victimize them, even if the aim is to help them get justice? The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (2016) states that “media coverage can re-victimize victims, especially if overly sensational or inaccurate. It can re-enforce misconceptions and myths about crime victims.” The Centre further notes that news coverage involving sexual assault cases may be among the most difficult for victims, adding that although society has come a long way in how it perceives sexual assaults, many myths about sexual assaults are still widely believed in society. For instance, most women are sexually assaulted by strangers; the extent of a woman’s resistance should be the major factor in determining if a sexual assault has occurred; a woman may be partly responsible for the assault if she is out alone at night, is drunk or dressed provocatively; and women lie about being sexually assaulted. Similarly, Bates (2013, p.3) notes that “we are living in a world in which female victims are blamed, stigmatized, cast out, doubted, re-victimized and showered with abuse in the wake of their ordeals.”

In view of the foregoing, this paper examined how the social media networking sites have re-victimized victims of sexual violence in Nigeria.

Statement of Research Problem

The media set agenda for public discourses. The agenda setting role of the media has been maximally exploited by the social networking sites. One common agenda that the social media sites constantly set in Nigeria is sexual exploitation of women. No doubt, the aim of this popular agenda may be to expose sexual offences against women, shame the offenders and help the victims get justice. But the lack of gate keeping and ethical considerations in the social media means that the ‘sympathizers,’ in many cases, post provocative pictures of the assaults, exposing sensitive parts of the victims without blurring their faces, in their attempt to show the gravity of the offences and trauma of the victims. A victim has no control over the length of time her story remains in the social media. The constant appearance and resurfacing of a victim’s story can re-traumatize and re-victimize her, giving her no chance to get over her pains. Again, most sexual assault cases against Nigerian women attract mixed reactions. They are viewed with gender, ethnic, political and religious lenses. Some comments and posts may just be too harsh as to upset the victims the more. These may have some traumatic effects on Nigerian women who are victims of sexual violence.

Research Questions

These research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. How do social media sites publish sexual offences against women in Nigeria?
2. Do social media sites re-victimize victims of sexual violence in Nigeria?
3. In which ways do social media exposure affect victims of sexual violence in Nigeria?
4. What are the survival strategies for victims of sexual violence who are re-victimized by social media in Nigeria?
5. How can re-victimization of victims of sexual violence through the social media be prevented in Nigeria?

Review of Related Literature

The World Report on violence and health (nd, p.149) defines sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work." The report identifies forms of sexual violence to include rape with marriage or dating relationships; rape by strangers; systematic rape during armed conflicts, unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment including sex in return for favours; sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people; sexual abuse of children; forced marriage or cohabitation, including the marriage of children; denial of the right to use contraception or adopt other measures to protect against sexually transmitted diseases; forced abortion; violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation, and obligatory inspection for virginity; forced prostitution and trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The report also identifies factors increasing women's vulnerability to sexual violence to include being young, consuming alcohol or drugs, having previously being raped or sexually abused, having many sexual partners, involvement in sex work, becoming more educated and economically empowered, at least where sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner is concerned and poverty.

Adeosun (2015, p.154) investigated adolescents' disclosure of sexual violence victimization in Nigeria, with a focus on prevalence, barriers and mental health implications. The study found that only 9.2% of the victims of sexual violence ever reported to anyone. Frequently reported barriers, according to the study were stigma (78.9%), consideration of discussion about sex as taboo (73.7%), fear of parents/authority figures (76.3%), mistrust of law enforcement agencies (71.1%) and fear of perpetrators (63.2%). Other reported barriers were ignorance that the act constitutes sexual abuse (34.2%), self-blame/guilt (31.6%) and fear of not being believed (36.8%). Similarly, Borishade (2014) examined perceived relevance among barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault for female undergraduate students in Nigeria. The study found that the refusal of victims of rape and other forms of sexual victimization in Nigeria to report have social underpinnings. Using qualitative information gathered from in-depth interviews of 23 rape victims, the study found that rather than social stigma, fear of retaliation by their assailants dominated the concerns of the university rape victims. According to the findings of the study, other barriers to rape reporting include lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, social stereotypes and prejudice against victims.

Idongesit (2014) investigated social media orchestrated gender-based violence among the youth in Nigeria, using a combination of content analysis of reported cases in the media and in-depth interview of victims. The findings of the study revealed a dangerous pattern of social media orchestrated gender-based violence among the youth. The findings of Idongesit's study are in consonance with the conclusion of Makinde, Odimegu, Abdulmalik, Babalola and Fawole (2016, p.67) on gender-based violence following social media acquaintance in Nigeria. The study found that "GBV (Gender-Based Violence) associated with acquaintances made on social media channels is emerging as a new social problem in Nigeria."

Kamaku and Mberia (2014) studied the influence of social media on the prevalence of sexual harassment among teenagers, with a focus on secondary schools in Kandara sub-county of Kenya. The study found that sexual cyber bullying can have many harmful effects on teenagers. Many of the bullied teens begin to miss school or skip classes so they do not have to face their peers or they are afraid for safety. Their grades can begin to suffer. Some students are removed from school and enrolled in a new one but because the image is public, the bullying often follows the student to the new school. Some may eventually drop out of school, never finishing their education. Students can develop depression, anxiety, drug addiction, eating disorder and/or other mental health issues

which have negative effects on their social and academic live. Citing Barak (2005), the authors state that “while media use is an integral part of the daily life of adolescents, there are a number of risks associated with social media use, specifically, negative effects on mental health, cyber bullying, texting/sexting, dangers of sexual solicitation, and exposure to problematic and illegal contents and privacy violations.” Also citing Campbell (2005), they note that “anonymity, instantaneousness, the ability to escalate quickly, and intrusiveness are features of the Internet and social media that can enable or increase bullying and sexual harassment. A lack of specific physical locale may also convince bullies or harassers that they are beyond the school’s legal reach as they sometimes are.”

Purohit, Banerjee, Hampton, Shalin, Bhaduria, and Sheth (nd, p.1) investigated gender-based violence in 140 characters or fewer: A #BigData case study of Twitter. The study covered five countries – India, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and the United States of America. The study reveals that “public institutions are increasing reliant on data from social media sites to measure public attitude and provide timely public engagement. Such reliance includes the exploration of public views on important social issues such as gender-based violence.” Using Linguistic Inquiry World Count (LIWC) software, the study analyzed language of the contents of all the tweets generated by both genders. It used predefined LIWC dictionaries that tally word frequencies in categories like anger, sexuality, sadness, health, etc. the study found that contents corresponding to these particular categories and, in fact, contents across the majority of the standard LIWC categories appeared more frequently in tweets of male origin relative to tweets of female origin (significance at the level of $p > 0.05$). Citing Jannen (1996), the authors conclude that, consistent with the research on gender issues in communication, female authors of the tweets studied were more collective and socially oriented. Their tweets call for action and are more likely to express or solicit agreement.

Nwabueze and Oduah (2015) content analyzed three Nigerian dailies - *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard* and *Guardian* - to examine the framing and representation of rape cases in the newspapers. The study found that the dominant frame of rape stories in the newspapers was innocence frame which portrayed victims of rape as innocent of the crime, rather than re-victimization frame which portrayed victims as responsible for the incident. But, Boyle (2012) argues that “violence against women, most notably rape, is reported from a male perspective that perpetrates stereotypes and myths about women while ridiculing and trivializing their needs and concerns.” This explains why Meyers (1997, p.103) contends that “if the news is to stop contributing to epidemic of violence against women and actually work to eradicate it, journalists must take responsibility for halting the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes that underlie patriarchal ideology and the mythology of anti-women violence.”

Fairbairn, Bivens and Dawson (2013) studied sexual violence and the social media. Between February and March 2013, they collected 187 survey responses from Ontario-based community organizations, educators, violence prevention advocates, and frontline workers. The study found that 79% of the respondents were aware of social media being used to control, harass, or stalk a current or former intimate partner; 76% were aware of posting or sharing intimate photos or text messages without consent; 65% were aware of posting or sharing sexually harassing or violent texts or images; 52% were aware of social media being used for sexual exploitation of minors; and 10% were not aware of violence, abuse, or harassment in their community related to social media.

Folaranmi (2013, p.74) conducted a survey on Facebook addiction level among selected Nigerian universities undergraduates and found that, out of the 994 students surveyed, 220 (22.1%) stated “meeting people” as their reason for using Facebook. Other reasons the study found are: school work 149 (15%), dating 134 (13.5%), uploading 113 (11.4%), chatting 194 (19.5%), uploading pictures 69 (6.9%), messaging 82 (8.2%), and celebrity follow-up 33 (3.3%).

The study reveals low level addiction (1.6%) particularly among university undergraduates in private universities, attributing the result to the low level of internet access generally in Nigeria.

Akpan, Akwaowo and Senam (2013, p.353) assessed the uses and gratifications of social networking websites among youth in Uyo and found that the youth in Uyo registered in at least 46 social networking websites. The study also found that the youth in the area were active users of social networking websites and accessed the websites for various purposes and gratifications. A majority of the respondents, 90 (25.1%) stated they registered because of the need to connect with old/new friends; 25 (7%) said they registered to have fun and relaxation; 17 (4.7%) respondents said they used the websites to promote their businesses; 25 (7%) of them stated that the social networking websites made them socially balanced; 20 (5.6%) said they joined to gain information while 50 (13.9%) registered to develop a relationship. It, however, found that the youth in the area were not always fulfilled in their expectations of social networking sites, although they made use of the websites daily.

In their survey study entitled "Nigerian youth and social media: Harnessing the potentials for academic excellence," Adaja and Ayodele (2013, p.65) found that 85 (67%) of the 127 respondents (undergraduates) who said they used Facebook did not use the platform for academic information exchange, while 42 (33%) responded that they used Facebook platform for academic information exchange.

Coyle and Vaughn (2008) conducted a survey study on how students on American college campuses engage in social networking and found that about a third of the people surveyed (37%) indicated they have one social networking account, 53% have two accounts, and 9% reported having three accounts. On average, the study shows that the people surveyed visited their accounts about three times per day. The study also found some reasons for which the students engaged in social media networks. Such reasons include: to keep in touch with friends (41%), it's fun; entertaining (17%), to post or look at photos (12%), when bored (12%), in response to someone contacting me on the site (10%), everyone is doing it (10%), when I don't have any contact info (7%), because you can send a message to multiple people (3%), and others (19%).

Govani and Pashley (2005) carried out a study on students' awareness of the privacy implications when using Facebook and put the reasons users join Facebook in two broad categories. Category A involves joining Facebook due to friend recommendations and peer pressure. Category B relates to the usefulness of Facebook in meeting new people, keeping in touch, getting help in courses, finding old friends, and making new friends. The results of the study indicate that most students joined Facebook for reasons belonging to both categories. More than 80% of the respondents stated that they joined Facebook because their friends suggested it and over 60% of them stated that they joined Facebook to help others keep in touch. The study found that a majority of students were aware of the ability to restrict the amount of information they provided to different Facebook users. But while 40% of users did restrict some of their information, there were still large numbers of users that were sharing very personal information like cell phone numbers and home addresses.

The negative use of the social networking site for sexual violence, exploitation and harassment of people, especially women, has taken a worrisome dimension. This trend is fuelled by the ubiquity of the new media devices and the difficulty in regulating social networking. Pempel (2016, p.1) writes that "the story of sexual assault and victimization through social media has unfortunately become commonplace. Between the universality of cell phones with cameras and the wide spread cultural adoption of social media, victims are often trapped in a wrath of character assassination and name-calling long after their assault. To make matters worse, victims often feel overlooked by the criminal justice system."

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the social responsibility theory. The social responsibility theory originated from the 1947 Hutchins Commission on press freedom in the United States of America. It underscores the need for the press to display a sense of responsibility in exercising its freedom.

Hutchins Commission identified key journalistic standards the responsible press should maintain: "provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning," "serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism," act as "a common carrier of the public expression," and give "a representative picture of constituent groups in society" (McQuail, 2005, p.171).

In the social responsibility theory, the press enjoys the freedom to operate, but the freedom has limits; it is guarded against abuse. This is where the social responsibility theory differs from the libertarian theory. Ojobor (2002, p.10) writes that "the libertarian era afforded the press so much unrestricted freedom that it became careless and irresponsible, thereby taking its freedom for granted." On the contrary, "social responsibility theory believes that freedom carries concomitant obligation. In it, the press is to be responsible to society by carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication" (Ojobor, 2002, p.11).

Ojobor (2002, p.10) states that the social responsibility theory emphasizes phrases like "the public's right to know" and "the public responsibility of the press." The social media allow people the freedom to know but this freedom should not be enjoyed by a citizen to the detriment of other citizens.

This theory is appropriate because it emphasizes freedom with responsibility. It is not enough for the people to enjoy the freedom to post whatever they want to post in the social media; it is equally important that the freedom to communication goes with the vigilance to communicate responsibility. This is what is missing in the social media interactions.

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. It used focus group discussion and personal interviews to generate data to answer the research questions. The focus discussion was used to elicit responses from the student respondents, while personal interviews were conducted to get the responses of selected victims of sexual violence whose stories were published in the social media platforms.

Population of the Study

The study used a population of 55 undergraduate students in the Department of Mass Communication, Renaissance University.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used a sample size of 8 (eight) students for the focus group discussion and 10 (ten) victims of sexual violence for the personal interviews. Quota sampling technique was adopted to choose two students from each of the four levels of undergraduate students of Mass Communication at Renaissance University, giving a total of eight students for the focus group discussion. Ten victims of sexual violence interviewed in the study were purposively selected based on accessibility and willingness to respond.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

For clarity and to ease understanding, the data generated for the study are discussed under the research questions they address. It had been stated that five research questions were posed to guide the study. The research questions are restated here.

Research Question 1: How do social media sites publish sexual offences against women in Nigeria?

The aim of this research question was to find out the ways, forms or styles social media sites published sexual offenses against women in Nigeria. All the focus group discussants, 8 (100%) stated that they had seen sexual assaults against women in Nigeria published in pictures in the social media. Six (75%) of the discussants were of the view that the pictures of the victims they saw were either completely nude or provocatively exposed sensitive parts of the victims' bodies, while 4 (40%) of them said the pictures they saw did not display the sensitive parts of the victims' bodies. From this finding, it is clear that social media displayed provocative pictures of sexual assaults against women in Nigeria. This corroborates what two of the victims of sexual assaults interviewed in the study said. One of them bemoaned: "I was surprised to see my nude pictures online. I didn't know when the pictures were taken. I wept when I saw them."

Most of the discussants, 7 (87.5%) noted that the stories of sexual violence against women in Nigeria they saw in the social media were not posted by the victims. Two of them (25%) said that the offenders posted some of the cases they saw, using fake identities. In line with the discussants' views, the 8 of the interviewees (80%) stated that they never took their cases to the social media nor asked anybody to do so on their behalf. Three of the interviewees, however, reported that their friends participated in sharing the posts of the incidents in the social media with the hope of helping them to get justice.

All the discussants (100%) agreed that some of those that post social violence against women in Nigeria in the social media accompany their stories with fake pictures. They also observed that the same pictures have been used for different sexual assault cases involving different women in Nigeria. Similarly, 6 (60%) of the interviewees confirmed that the pictures attached to their stories in the social media were not their stories. This places some doubt on the credibility of some of the stories, especially the pictures accompanying them.

Five of the discussants (62.5%) stated that the stories on violence against Nigerian women in the social media were blown out of proportions. According to them, the stories were often exaggerated to attract greater attention.

Research Question 2: Do social media sites re-victimize victims of sexual violence in Nigeria?

All the discussants (100%) stated that exposing the pictures and stories of sexual violence in the social media re-victimizes the victims of the assaults. They observed that when pictures of the incidents go viral in the social networking sites, the victims' trauma is aggravated and perpetuated. All the victims of sexual violence interviewed shared the same view. One of them regretted: "It was more offensive to me than the original offense. It meant punishing me the second time. I felt the world crumbling upon me because I had nowhere to hide anymore." Another of the victims noted: "Yes, the social media added salt to my injury. I got phone calls from friends far away saying they read my stories in the social media. The worst side of it was that the account was exaggerated. Each call reminded me of the ugly experience, that animal in man." From these, we can conclude that the social networking sites can re-victimize and re-traumatize victims of sexual violence in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: In which ways does social media exposure affect victims of sexual violence in Nigeria?

The discussants identified various effects of social media exposures on victims of sexual violence in Nigeria. They observed that the exposures make the victim to live "broken lives." According to them, given that the social networking sites are everywhere, the victims have no hiding place and have little or no opportunities to live "fresh lives." Similarly, they stated that social exposures can cause social stigma against victims of

sexual violence. This can affect their relationships with their peers, family members, professional colleagues, and suitors.

Again, the respondents noted that some victims could withdraw from the public if they could not cope with the negative publicity in the social media. They added that some of them withdrew from schools, jobs and business because they could not cope. This view finds expression in the response of one of the victims interviewed to this question: "What am I going out to do? Life means little to me now. I have lost my appetite. I have not taken my life just because I don't want to offend God. Where do I go that the story can't find me?"

The discussants stated that some of the victims can engage in substance abused to keep up. This is because, according to them, the victims might just be looking for possible ways of escape from the psychological consequences of their negative presence in the social networking sites. And, any victim that gets to this can become anti-social. This can equally result in mental disorder, requiring psychiatric attention. All these can result from emotional destabilization of such victims. One of the victims interviewed put her response to the question this way: "I don't take hard drugs but I take alcoholic drinks all the time to forget the sorrow. When I don't drink, I worry; if I drink, I feel better."

The respondents stated that some of the victims of sexual violence can commit suicide if they think that exposures in the social networking sites have made them lose all opportunities to live fresh lives. According to them, this level can result from frustration arising from stigmatization, isolation and victim-blaming. Four (40%) of the victims said their experiences had made them develop hatred for men to the point that they have decided not to get married to men at any stage of their lives.

These negative consequences of social media re-victimization of victims of sexual violence replicate fuel and complicate offline challenges the victims face. Bates (2012:2) reports the testimony of a Darfuri woman interviewed by *Physicians for Human Rights* for their 2009 report, *Nowhere to Turn*. The interviewee stated: "after the man raped me, my family would not eat with me. They treated me like a dog and I had to eat alone." Bates further reports that in Sudan, where tens of thousands of people have been displaced from their homes by fighting and destruction, where the lives of refugees have already been devastated by the loss of their homes and families, women bear a second, enduring pain. Because for many Darfuri women, the "crime" of falling victim to rapists and sexual attackers renders them valueless, "dishonored" and rejected. Many have been divorced, exiled, and cast out by their own husbands and communities. These victims of sexualized violence are victimized again by the shame and stigma forced on them in a culture that places blame on those who have suffered and ignores those who brutally attacked them.

Research Question 4: What are the survival strategies for victims of sexual violence who are re-victimized by social media in Nigeria?

The focus group discussants identified some survival strategies victims of sexual assaults who are re-victimized by social media can adopt. The suggestions include:

- a. Victims should stay away from social media platforms
- b. Victims should avoid self defense and discourage their friends from sharing their stories in social networking sites.
- c. Victims should engage in constructive ventures that can overshadow their trauma and the negatives about them.
- d. Victims can go for psycho-therapy.
- e. NGOs can identify and organize counseling sessions for such victims.
- f. Victims who are religious can seek peace and solace in their religions.
- g. Victims can turn to caring family members and peers for emotional and moral support.

In addition to the above strategies, the victims of social violence interviewed in this study stated some of the strategies they have adopted for survival, including:

- a. Reading accounts of people who survived similar assaults and their strategies.
- b. Listening to music
- c. Playing and watching games
- d. Blocking offensive friends from their online accounts.
- e. Deleting all their social media posts
- f. Closing their social media accounts.
- g. Engaging the services of popular bloggers and online activists to tell their stories and launder their image.

Research Question 5: How can re-victimization of victims of sexual violence through the social media be prevented in Nigeria?

The discussants stated some ways re-victimization of victims of sexual violence in Nigeria by social networking sites can be prevented. The identified ways include:

- a. Blurring the faces of the victims in the pictures posted.
- b. Using pseudo names, instead of victims' real names.
- c. Campaigners should educate victims adequately on the implications of using their stories and pictures for social media protests against sexual violence.
- d. Laws should be made in Nigeria to prevent posting indecent pictures in the social media.
- e. NGOs should educate social media users in the country on correct ways of using the platforms for decent communication.
- f. Pictures of the offenders should be published, instead of the victims.
- g. Government should set up a unit that will examine and track social media contents in the country.

Conclusion

The study investigated how social media re-victimized and re-traumatized female victims of sexual violence in Nigeria. The findings of the study show that social networking sites re-victimized female victims of sexual assaults in Nigeria by exaggerating their stories, posting their nude and provocative pictures, using fake pictures to share their stories, blaming them for their ordeals and sharing their stories without their consent, among other ways.

The study concludes that the style of sharing of stories of female victims of sexual assaults in Nigeria in the social media sites aggravates and perpetuates the pains of the victims. This, according to the finding of the study, has adverse consequences including social stigmatization of the victims, substance abuse by the victims, frustration of the victims, withdrawal of the victims from public space, and suicide.

Recommendations

These recommendations are made in line with the findings of the study.

1. Social media users should be sensitized on the ways their publications re-victimize victims of sexual violence.
2. The Civil Society, relevant NGOs, and government agencies should educate identified victims of sexual violence on how to avoid social media re-victimization.
3. The National Orientation Agency, National Youth Service Corps, Universities and other relevant organizations should organize counseling programmes for depressed victims of sexual violence who have suffered social media re-victimization. This will reduce their emotional traumas.
4. Victims of sexual violence should stop publishing their ordeals in the social media. This is because such stories usually suffer some distortions, to the detriment of the victims, when they are retold by other social media users.

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