CULTURAL ISSUES IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND RITUAL KILLINGS IN NIGERIA: ASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The issue of violence against women has remained a growing source of concern to social scientists, human rights groups and the international community as a whole. Various studies have identified violence against women as a serious public health concern that inhibits gender parity and sustainable development. Violence against women, unfortunately, is disturbingly widespread in Nigeria and has assumed critical dimensions including forced marriage, trafficking in women, rape, acid baths and the killing of women for ritual purposes. As noted by various reports available to this study, the spate of killings for ritual purposes is at an alarming rate in Nigeria with women documented as primary victims. This study emerged from the recognition that the killing of women for ritual purposes is a serious gender-based violence with development implications, and is not unconnected to harmful cultural beliefs and prejudices regarding the female identity and the value of women in the society. To substantiate this thesis, a cross-sectional survey involving four hundred respondents conveniently selected from four purposively selected cities in the Southern part of Nigeria; namely Lagos, Warri, Yenagoa and Port Harcourt, was carried out. Data collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as charts and percentage analysis, revealed that women are usually killed for ritual purposes than men mainly because women are perceived as soft targets and 'objects' with intrinsic 'enriching' value. The study thus recommends the formulation and implementation of policies that protect women from violence and the abolition of cultural beliefs that endanger women in the society.

Keywords: Culture; Development; Gender-Based Violence; Ritual Killing; Violence against Women

Introduction

Violence against women has remained a serious issue of concern in society today. It is currently considered a global crisis of pandemic proportions and a major public health problem that inhibits gender parity and development of society. Violence against women can fit into several broad categories which includes violence perpetrated by individuals and those sustained by the social system. As noted by the World Medical Association (2019); Rosché and Dawe (2013) and Mason (2013) violence against women has become a worldwide complex issue with many manifestations and in various forms such as rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, obstetric violence, as well as in harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, widow inheritance and forced marriage, among many others. Although violence against women has been mentioned in various local and international forums, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, as a significant public health concern; it was the 1993 United Nations General Assembly resolution on the elimination of violence against women that became the first platform where the phenomenon of gender-based violence was explicitly defined and its extent and implications elaborated on. As noted by WHO (2017); George (2015) and Russo and Pirlott (2006), violence against women occurs on every continent and in every country, making it one of the most pervasive human rights violations around the world.

Violence against women, also referred to as Gender-based violence, takes many forms including physical, sexual, emotional and psychological violent behaviour against the womenfolk. In Nigeria, gender-based violence is commonplace and appears to be tolerated or at least overlooked by the society as very diminutive reprimands are meted on perpetrators. As noted by Oladeji (2013), violence is a regular part of most women's life experiences in Nigeria, especially in the home. Common forms of violence against women prevalent in Nigeria include female genital mutilation, virginity tests, forced marriage, wife beating, neglect, rape, incest, molestation, acid bathing and other forms of sexual harassment, forced prostitution and trafficking in women (George, 2015; Asagba and Bolaji, 2014; Oladeji, 2013; Joda, Zubairu, Abdulwaheed, and Abara, 2007).

With the rising incidence of killings for ritual purposes in Nigeria, and the increasing number of women recorded as victims, violence against women may have taken a new dangerous dimension. Reports have

shown that killing of women; incidents of necrophilia and severing their body parts for money rituals have become persistent occurrences that have assailed our space in recent times. This study emerged from the recognition that killing of women for ritual purposes is gender based violence and is not unconnected to harmful cultural beliefs and prejudices regarding the female identity and the value of women in the society. Thus, the study attempts to find out how cultural beliefs, customs and practices engender gender-based violence and the killing of women for ritual purposes.

Aim and Objectives of the study
The aim of this study is to investigate how cultural beliefs engender gender-based violence and the killing of women for ritual purposes in Nigeria. In pursuance of this, the objectives of the study are:
(i)   To investigate how the culture of the selected states define women and the value of women in the society.
(ii)   To investigate the specific cultural beliefs that encourages violence against women in the selected states.
(iii) To investigate how cultural beliefs encourage the killing of women for ritual purposes.

Research Questions
(i)   How does the culture of a community define women and the value of women in the society?
(ii)   What specific cultural beliefs endorse violence against women in Nigeria?
(iii) What cultural beliefs encourage the killing of women for ritual purposes in Nigeria?

Meaning and Extent of Violence against Women in Nigeria
Violence against women is not just a malevolent act against women, but a public health emergency with serious implications. It bespeaks of disregard for women's fundamental human rights and reduced understanding of the role of women in the society. Violence against women has been explained as violent acts primarily or exclusively committed against women and girls, expressly because they are female. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) asserted that violence against women is violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or any violence that affects women disproportionately, and as noted by Heise, Ellsberg and Gottenmoeller (2009), such violence has a range of adverse physical and mental health outcomes as well as socio-economic and national implications. Statistics from a study conducted by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2013 with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South Africa Medical Research Council, using existing data from over 80 countries reveals that worldwide one in three or 35% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or a non-partner sexual violence. Worldwide, 38% of all women who have been murdered were murdered by their intimate partners while the other proportion where killed by strangers or in a conflict.

WHO (2017) had noted that in countries where there is no law against gender-based violence, as is the case in 46 countries, women's average life expectancy is typically shorter than that of men, largely because their freedom and safety are not guaranteed. It is also important to know that the implications of violence against women are enormous. For instance Withers (2018); Duvvury (2016) and George (2015) had noted that the social and economic costs of violence against women usually have ripple effects throughout society. Russo and Pirlott (2006) also noted that victims of gender-based violence usually suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities, and the limited ability to care for themselves and their children, while some even die in the process. Withers (2018) noted that gender-based violence also drains resources from social services, the justice system and welfare support services. This is hinged on the fact that victims of gender-based violence utilize health care services more that those who are not experiencing violence. Other indirect economic costs include loss of personal income, absenteeism and reduced productivity. Duvvury (2016) noted that violence against women also imposes burdens on the informal systems of family, kinship and community networks. For United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2018) gender-based violence hampers countries efforts to reduce poverty; it undermines human rights, women's educational and employment opportunities, well-being and development prospects of children and communities, which are all fundamental to achieving sustainable development goals.

In Nigeria, violence against women is becoming widespread and unfortunately affecting growth and sustainable development in the country, particularly as it deprives the country of the contribution of the female population to social, economic and environmental development (Oladeji, 2013). From forced and early marriages to the physical, mental or sexual assault on women, nearly 3 in 10 Nigerian women today have experienced physical violence by age 15 (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), 2013). Relief Web (2018) posits that gender-based violence remains one of the most serious threats to the health 5and safety of women and girls in Nigeria as women and girls are at increased risk of violence and abduction. The situation has worsened with the ongoing insurgency in the country, particularly in the North East and Middle Belt where hundreds of women and girls have been abducted by various terrorist groups.

Theoretical discourse surrounding Violence against Women
While there is no part of the world, country or culture in which women's freedom from violence has been completely secured, violence against women in Nigeria has become acutely widespread and appears intractable, subjecting millions of Nigerian women to a life of oppression and exploitation and reducing many of them to insignificant citizens in many respects. Many women in Nigeria today are unable to explore and develop their personal and social potentials, making it difficult for them to gain financial freedom or participate and contribute significantly to political and economic matters that concern them. There are many theories that have been proposed to explain this situation such as the very popular feminist theory, social exchange theories, resource theory, and social control theory. Some of these theories argue that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Meaning that violence against women occur largely because women and men are not equal in the society. Following this line of reasoning, Womankind (2015) posited that violence against women is systemic, noting that gender inequality in education, access to employment, reward system, economic and property rights, freedom to marry and divorce, etc, predicted higher levels of partner violence, as did settings where male authority over women's behaviour is considered normal and where violence against women is widely seen to be acceptable. Another school of thought argues that the tendency for violence against women is located within the person. This individualist approach argues that violence against women in the society can only be understood in terms of individual choices, personality traits and characteristics, interests, biology, genetics and pathologies that some men have. In line with this, different studies have revealed that psychologically disturbed men may find it comfortable to maltreat women or other disadvantaged group in the society. Researchers who adopt this perspective often focus on childhood and other experiences which shape some men to become 'abusers'. Feminist approaches on the other hand congregate around the thesis that violence against women exists as part of patriarchal social structures, and is an intentional pattern of behaviour operated to establish and maintain control over women in the society. This study explains the phenomenon of violence against women using the *objectification theory* which argues that certain socio-cultural prescriptions have conditioned the society to see women basically as objects or tools that can be bought, owned and used, hence the tendency to abuse and violate their rights and autonomy (Balraj, 2015; Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Bartky, 1990). For Balraj (2015) and Bartky (1990), objectification occurs when a woman's body parts or functions are separated out from her person and reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her.

Theoretical framework
Objectification theory provides an important framework for researches in understanding violence against women and the phenomenon of killing women for ritual purposes in Nigeria. As noted by Oyediran and Isiugo-Abaniher (2005) the social context of violence in Nigeria is based largely on its patriarchal society. Generally, violence against a woman is seen as a tool that the male partner uses to ensure and elicit submission from the women. Furthermore, in most societies in Nigeria, women are also viewed as private property or objects that can be 'owned' and 'kept' their husbands. This entitlement culture is usually preserved with a bridal wealth exchanged in marriage as a 'price' paid to buy the woman. Beyond this, female body parts are used to rate the status of women in the society. The Nigeria societies also attaches certain spiritual beliefs to women's body parts, while in many others myths exist about the ritual potency of female body parts. For example, investigations by the Vanguard Newspaper in 2014 showed that female body parts are more in demand than their male counterparts largely because of what was described as the potency of some parts of the female body, such as the breasts and genitals, in bringing luck and prosperity. Reports from the arrest of suspected ritualists have further revealed that ritual killings in Nigeria are performed to harvest

human body parts, especially that of women, to prepare potions and charms (Falayi, 2017; Usman and Sessou, 2014; Osumah and Aghedo, 2011; Omoarelojie, 2005). Body parts and bodily fluids of virgins and children are also reportedly highly sought after by ritualists who believe it has the potency to elongate the user's life span and also fortify them against spiritual attacks. These acts are seen as spinoffs of the culture that relegates women to a place of inferiority and considers them and their body parts as things, alongside the crude belief that women's body parts possess ritual potency to bring wealth and good fortune.

Methods

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method primarily because of its aim to collect data from the various sub groups of the target population. Four hundred respondents were conveniently selected from four cities which were also purposively selected from the Southern part of Nigeria; namely Lagos, Warri, Yenagoa and Port Harcourt (PH) City. The choice of these cities is on the basis of their metropolitan status and the high rate of reported killings that appear to be for ritual purposes in their suburbs. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage analysis, frequency distribution and charts. In addition to the survey, data from secondary sources such as journal articles and Newspaper reports from 2005 to 2019 were also employed to buttress the findings of the study.

Results

Socio-Demographic information of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Lagos	Warri	PH City	Yenagoa	Total	Per%
Gender	Male	50	50	50	50	200	50.0
	Female	50	50	50	50	200	50.0
Age	18 – 37	47	39	37	41	164	41.0
	38 – 57	32	41	44	32	149	37.3
	58 – Above	21	20	19	27	87	21.8
Marital Status	Single	38	41	32	47	158	39.5
	Married	18	25	24	19	86	21.5
	Cohabiting	21	11	19	12	63	15.8
	Divorced	12	10	13	13	48	12.0
	Widowed	11	13	12	9	45	11.3
Education level	Primary School	12	16	14	16	58	14.5
	Secondary School	22	23	13	36	94	23.5
	OND/NCE	19	17	21	17	74	18.5
	B.Sc/HND	34	29	36	21	120	30.0
	Post-Graduate	13	15	16	10	54	13.5
Occupation	Unemployed	17	21	19	15	72	18.0
	Self-Employed	24	21	21	25	91	22.8
	Civil servant	19	21	17	19	76	19.0
	Private sector	11	17	15	18	61	15.3
	Student	29	20	28	23	100	25.0

Note: Percentage may not total 100.0 owing to approximation

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The survey, in Table 4.1, revealed that the respondents are males and females within the ages of 18 – 37 years (41.0%), 38 – 57 years (37.3%) and 58 and above (21.8%); who are mostly single (39.5%), married (21.5%), cohabiting (15.8%), divorced (12.0%) or widowed (11.3%). Most of the respondents are university graduates (30.0%), while some others have only primary school education (14.5%). Another 23.5% or 94 of the respondents have only secondary education, 18.5% or 74 of the respondents have OND's or its NCE equivalent, while the remaining 13.5% or 54 of the respondents have Post Graduate degrees such as M.Sc and PhD in various fields (See Figure 4.1).

Majority of the respondents, that is 25.0% or 100 of the respondents, are students of various schools in the selected study areas; 22.8% or 91 of the respondents are self-employed, another 19.0% or 76 of the

respondents are civil servants, and 15.3% or 61 of the respondents are in the private sector, while the remaining 18.0% or 72 of the respondents are unemployed.

Presentation and Analysis of data
How does the culture of your community define women and the value of women in the society?
The study here investigated how women are perceived in the selected study areas, particularly the culturally acceptable activities, roles and responsibilities of women in the society.

Table 4.2   Are women seen as equal to men in your community?

Study Area	Yes	No	Maybe
Lagos	11	86	3
Warri	13	75	12
PH City	19	77	4
Yenagoa	17	81	2
Total	60	319	21

Source: Field Survey (2019)

On whether women are perceived as equal to men in the selected study areas, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents, 79.7% (n=319), indicated that women are not seen as equal to men in their community. Only 15.0% (n=60) of the respondents indicated that women are perceived as equal to women by the culture of their area, while the remaining 5.3% (n=21) indicated that sometimes men and women are considered equals, especially on some issues such as in education, religion and roles and responsibilities in the family. For this set of respondents, gender parity has become possible as a result of the phenomenon of modernization which is changing culturally defined gender roles and gender relations in Nigerian societies.

As shown in Figure 4.1, the study also investigated if women have the same opportunities (at home, work and in politics) like men. Of the 400 respondents, only 14.25% or 57 of the respondents agreed that women have equal opportunities like men. Another 7.25% or 29 of the respondents indicated that perhaps women have equal opportunities like men, especially as women have at one time or the other enjoyed privileges only men used to access. However, 78.5% or 314 of the respondents indicated strongly that women do not have equal access and opportunities like men in most Nigerian societies.
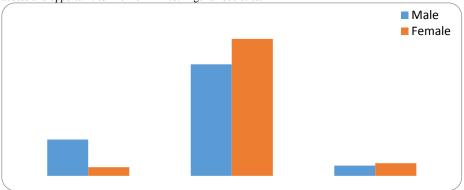

Figure 4.1: Do women have equal opportunities like men? Source: Field Survey (2019)

In Table 4.3, most of the respodents, 78.75% or 315, indicated that whereas women are oftentimes relegated in the society, they are very important for community development and that of Nigeria as a whole. Only 7.75% or 31 of the respodents are of the opinion that women are not really important for community development, noting that the role women play is not necessarily crucial in the society. The remaining 13.5% or 54 of the respondnets were undecided.

Table 4.3: Do you see women as important for community development?

Category	Yes	No	Maybe
Male	131	31	38
Female	184	0	16
Total	315	31	54

Source: Field Survey (2019)

What specific cultural beliefs endorse violence against women in Nigeria?
To elicit accurate and sufficient information on the above research question, the study first investigated how widespread some beliefs about women are, the extent people hold these beliefs and how these beliefs contribute to gender-based violence in the society. As shown in Table 4.4, most of the respondents indicated that beliefs such as women are a weaker sex (97.3% or 389), women are good at only housechores and raising kids (96.5% or 386), some women have good forutne (94.0% or 376), spirits posses women more easily than the do to men (96.3% or 385) and if you want to be spiritually strong you have to avoid intercourse with women (95.5% or 382), are common beliefs in their communities.

Table 4.4   What are the common cultural beliefs about women in the Society?

Common beliefs about women in the Society	Lagos		Warri		PH City		Yenagoa		**Total**	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	**Yes**	**No**
Women are a weaker sex	97	03	97	03	98	02	97	03	**389**	**11**
Women are good at only housework and raising kids	97	03	95	05	97	03	97	03	**386**	**14**
Some women have good fortune, and can bring their partners wealth	91	09	97	03	94	06	94	06	**376**	**24**
Spirits possess women much easier than men	98	02	96	04	94	06	97	03	**385**	**15**
If you want to be spiritually strong, avoid intercourse with women	94	06	94	06	97	03	97	03	**382**	**18**

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Furthermore, as shown in Table 4.5, 87.8% (n=351) of the respondents indicated that they agree strongly with the belief that women are a weaker sex. Only 10.5% (n=42) strongly disagreed, while the remaining 1.8% (n=7) were undecided. An overwhelming 74.8% (n=299) of the respondnets also indicated that they strongly agree that women are mainly effective at housechores and child rearing; however 19.3% (n=77)of the respondnets srongly disagree noting that women have also proven efficiency in many other fields and occupations in the society.

Table 4.5   To what extent do you agree with these cultural beliefs about women?

Responses	S. Agree	(%)	S. Disagree	(%)	Undecided	(%)	Total
Women are a weaker sex	351	87.8	42	10.5	7	1.8	400
Women are good at only housework and raising kids	299	74.8	77	19.3	24	6.0	400
Some women have good fortune, and can bring their partners wealth	301	75.3	78	19.5	21	5.3	400
Spirits possess women much easier than men	377	94.3	21	5.3	2	0.5	400
If you want to be spiritually strong, avoid intercourse with women	329	82.3	61	15.3	10	2.5	400
				Note: Percentage may not total 100.0 owing to approximation			

Source: Field Survey (2019)

On whether women have fortune imbued in them and can bestow on their partners good luck wealth, while 19.5% (n=78) strongly disagreed and 5.3% (n=21) were undecided, 75.3% (n=301) of the respondnetsindicated that they strongly agree with such beliefs. For this set of respondents some women get married and suddenly their partners become very wealth, and in other cases their partners being penniless and 'unfortunate'. Furthermore, 94.3% (n=377) indicated that they also agree strongly with the common belief that women are much easily possessed by *spirits* (such as evil, demonic forces) than men. Also, 82.3% (n=329) of the respondents strongly agreed with the common belief that men should avoid sexual intercourse (with women) whenever they need to boost *spiritual* strength, while 15.3% (n=61) of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 4.6   Which of the following cultural beliefs contribute to violence against women?

Variables	S. Agree	(%)	S. Disagree	(%)	Undecided	(%)	Total
Women should always submit and obey men	269	67.25	101	25.25	30	7.5	400
If you do not control women they become wayward	291	72.75	81	20.25	28	7	400
Women need men around for protection & safety	301	75.25	78	19.5	21	5.25	400
A woman should rely on a man for her needs	284	71.0	97	24.25	19	4.75	400
Men have the right to discipline women for incorrect behaviour	329	82.25	61	15.25	10	2.5	400

Note: Percentage may not total 100.0 owing to approximation

Source: Field Survey (2019)

The study also investigated the extent to which certain cultural beliefs in the selected communities contribute to gender based violence. As shown in Table 4.6, 269 or 67.25% of the respondnets Strongly agreed that the belief that women should always submit to men contribute to violence against women. Only 25.25% strongly disagreed, while the remaining 30 or 7.5% were undecided. Furthermore, 291 or 72.25% of the respodnents trongly agreed that the belief that if women are not controled, they will become wayward also contributes to violence against women, especially as it encourages men and even women to subject women to bodily and emotional punishments and violations as a way of keeping them in check. While 28 or 7.0% of the respondnets were undecided, 81 or 20.25% of the respondents disagreed. An overwhleming percentage of the population also indicated that other beliefs that encourage violence against women include the beliefs that women need men around for protection and safety (75.25%), women should rely on men for their needs (71.0% or 284) and the that men have the right to discipline women for any incorrect behaviour (82.25% or 329).

What cultural beliefs encourage killing of women for ritual purposes in Nigeria?
Whereas statistics reveal that ritual killings are high in Nigeria and women are primary targets, much of the reasons behind the targeting of women remain unclear. This study thus investigated the various beliefs that encourage violence against women and the killing of women for ritual purposes.

Table 4.7   What cultural beliefs encourage violence and killing of women for rituals?

Variables	S. Agree	(%)	S. Disagree	(%)	Undecided	(%)	Total
Women body parts (such as hair, breasts, genitals, etc) can make one rich	132	33.0	24	6.0	9	2.3	165
Women do not have economic power so they depend on men who often times harm them	107	26.8	19	4.8	11	2.8	137
Women are weaker sex and softer targets	79	19.8	11	2.8	8	2.0	98

Note: Percentage may not total 100.0 owing to approximation

Source: Field Survey (2019)

As shown in Table 4.7, although some of the respondents were in disagreement or undecided, majority of the respondents, 33.0% (n=132), indicated that women are usually targeted for ritual killings mainly because of the cultural belief that women's body parts (such as the hair, breasts, genitals, etc) have innate virtues that can make one rich. Another 26.8% (n=107) indicated that women are targeted because they usually depend on men for their economic needs, so they become vulnerable to ritual killings. Some of the respondents, 19.8% (n=79), also indicated that women are usually targeted primarily because it is culturally believed that women are a weaker sex and are thus a softer targets for killers.

Violence against women and Sustainable development in Nigeria
The idea of sustainable development is hinged on a number of factors such as a steady economic growth, visible environmental stewardship and an encompassing human development, all of which are believed to work concomitantly to ensure consistency in development. The main theme of sustainable development conversations today focuses on the causes of deprivation, the strategies to alleviate it, as well as the factors requisite for sustainability. As noted by scholars, such as Hawley (2016), Duflo, (2012), Babacan (2005), Sittirak (1998), whereas the paradigm of sustainable development advocates economic growth as a way to overcome poverty, unemployment and inequalities, it also emphasizes on the empowerment and protection of women in the society. This is hinged on the fact that development does not operationalize itself in terms of uniform benefits for men alone and disadvantages for all women; rather it is a wide-ranging strategy that includes the expansion of opportunities for both men and women.

Nigeria's plan for sustainable development including the empowerment and protection of women has remained remote considering the fact that women and girls still face unacceptable levels of discrimination and abuse, which is not only wrong, but also prevents them from playing a full part in society and decision-making. For instance, the phenomenon of ritual killings and sacrifices in Nigeria has become worrisomely widespread contributing to the increasing challenge of women development in the country (Usman, 2017; Igwe, 2010; Igwe, 2004 and Smith, 2001). For Usman (2017); Igwe (2010); Igwe (2004) and Smith (2001), the spate of killings for ritual purposes has reached an alarming rate in Nigeria with little or no effort by concerned government agencies to checkmate the trend. Everyday people get missing, abducted, hunted and killed apparently for ritual purposes as their corpses are usually mutilated and vital parts such as the ears, eyes, tongue, breasts, pubic hair or genitals are usually harvested. Though not only women have been victims of ritual murders in Nigeria, however the increasing number of women involved raises the concern of why women are primary targets and tends to classify it a violence meted on females largely because they are females.

As shown in the findings of this study, the killing of women for ritual purposes in Nigeria is deeply embedded in cultural beliefs and traditional institutions. As one of the results of this study have revealed, an overwhelming number of the respondents agree that there is the deep-seated belief that women should always submit and obey men, women need to be controlled so they do not become wayward, women need men around for protection, woman should always rely on a man for her needs and men have the right to discipline women for incorrect behaviour in their communities. Various cultural practices are usually employed to vilify or silence women who dare to assert themselves against the limitations culture places on them, just as heavy traditional sanctions are meted against women who tries to retaliate either verbally or non-verbally against violent hegemonic masculinity. Majority of the respondents also indicated that besides the fact that women are considered a weaker target and thus a soft target for ritual killings, women's body parts (such as the hair, breasts, genitals, etc) are believed to possess virtues that can make one rich. Again, women do not also have economic power so they depend on men who often times take advantage of them or harm them.

The implications of these on sustainable development are enormous particularly as women population is reduced through these killings. Again, the killing of women for ritual purposes also impacts negatively on the motivation for women to participate actively in social, political and economic activities in the country as more women become scared to take risks, do business, get education or move around freely out of fear of being abducted or killed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From prehistory to the twenty-first century, the practice of human sacrifice and ritual killings in many areas of Africa, including Nigeria, is well documented. Scholars, such as Usman (2017), Igwe (2010) and Igwe, (2004), have noted that in many African communities, whereas human sacrifices and rituals were done for a number of reasons, it was mainly intended to bring good fortune to persons, celebrate special events or to appease certain deities. Cultural studies have revealed that some traditional African communities are known to offer human sacrifices to celebrate the installation of a new king or to mark the death of royalty. In modern times, some witch doctors have also been found to use human body parts to bring people luck and wealth. In fact, the black market for human body parts is said to be thriving in many African societies, including Nigeria. Ritual murder here covers all types of killings that relate to the murder of people specifically for any magical purpose. 'Ritualists', as noted by Falayi (2017), United nations (2005), usually hunt for and harvest human body parts to prepare charms and magical concoctions for their clients.

With these recurrent incidences of ritual killings in the country and its connections with gender-based violence, one is forced to ask why such brutal and barbaric act persists in spite of the level of civilization and globalization. Various explanations have been offered by scholars and many social scientists. While some blame the problem on the economic conditions in the country especially as ritual killings increase in periods of economic hardship; others argue that traditional beliefs in fetish and rituals have permeated the twenty-first century. Salisbury (2012) noted that those who practice sacrifice and ritual killings believe them to be acts of spiritual fortification. Motivations to carry out these acts include the use of human body parts for medicinal purposes and the belief that human body parts possess supernatural powers that bring prosperity and protection. In Uganda, for instance, researches have shown that human sacrifice is usually done by many wealthy persons in an effort to expand their fortunes. In Swaziland and Liberia, politicians allegedly commission ritual killings to improve their odds in elections (Salisbury, 2012; Igwe, 2004). In Nigeria, many people still believe that charms and ritual sacrifices can fortify them spiritually, enhance their fortunes in business and during elections, or protect them from harm, disease, poverty, accident, death or destruction. These beliefs have been identified to further encourage some persons to participate in ritual murders to appease deities, pray for supernatural favours, ward off misfortune or create mystical wealth.

As noted by World Health Organization (2009) Hussain and Khan (2008) harmful traditional practices are largely a product of social norms which aim to uphold cultural ideas about gender roles and social relations. Many of these practices, including forced marriage, rape, female genital mutilation, virginity testing, widowhood rituals, accusations of witchcraft, acid violence and domestic violence, have become very widespread and make it more acceptable for men to target women for ritual killings. For instance traditional beliefs that men have a right to control or discipline women through physical means make women vulnerable to gender-based violence the same way the belief that nature had imbued in women virtues that can bring wealth when used for sacrifices exposes women to ritual killings. Women are also socialized to accept the weaker status and to consider being violated as part of the package of womanhood. Many communities also have myths about the woman's body and many other cultural beliefs about the ritual potency of her body parts. Some believe in the idea that a young woman can rejuvenate the body of an older man if he had sex with her. This myth is not unconnected to the increasing sexual assault of the girl child and women in the society. Premised on the following, the study thus recommends that:

1) The government at all levels should ensure the formulation and implementation of policies that protect women from all forms of violence, and also ensure the abolition of cultural beliefs that objectify women and expose them to risk of violence in the society. This includes the censorship of the media on presenting images and ideas that encourages gender-based violence and ritual killings.

2) Also, government at all levels and concerned agencies should make efforts to regularly educate the public by exposing the ignorance, superstition, and irrationality that underlie the belief in and practice of ritual killing. This can be done through organizing awareness and enlightenment campaigns in schools, orientation camps, work places, markets and community meetings.

3) Efforts should also be made to discourage cultural practices that impoverish women by denying them income yielding assets and economic independence, all of which directly and indirectly make women willing victims to contractual sex, sexual trafficking, violence, domestic violence and ritual killing.

4) It has also become imperative for Nigerian government to include ritual killing in its programs and campaigns as a harmful traditional practice that must be stopped.

5)   Also, government at all levels should expand the opportunities of women in the society to reduce their economic disabilities and over reliance on a patriarchal system that sometimes hunt and harm them.

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