A NIGHT FOR 1KG OF RICE: THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN & GIRLS IN NE NIGERIA

Field Report: October, 2019

Gender Based Violence Sub Sector, Nigeria

Email: nga.gbv@humanitarianresponse.info
Website: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nigeria/gender-based-violence
A NIGHT FOR 1KG OF RICE: THE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION
Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) is a form of Gender Based Violence (GBV) that constitutes an abuse of power against the affected population. It is based in gender inequality, power imbalance and disrespect of human rights. GBV occurring in the context of sexual exploitation and transactional sex are defined by the power relationship between the survivor and perpetrator, as well as the circumstances surrounding the incident – not the actual act of violence (i.e. rape or sexual assault).

Humanitarian emergencies, as well as interventions, can compound existing risks by increasing the power imbalances between men and women and exacerbate GBV and SEA. The key drivers of GBV and SEA include social norms that legitimate violence against women, lack of laws and policies to protect women and children from violence, weak or ineffective protection and response systems, among others.

The risk of SEA and other forms of GBV continue to be a reality and remains one of the major manifestations of the on-going conflict in north east Nigeria. Transactional/survival sex, a form of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) that occurs when sex is exchanged directly or indirectly for material support, is common in such context of extreme poverty. IDPs, specifically women, single female headed households, adolescents, girls with disabilities, girl hawkers and those who are experiencing food insecurity are among the most vulnerable to experience GBV and are more likely to engage in survival sex. Survivors are also exposed to re-occurring abuse and continue to experience stigma and shame.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE: METHODOLOGY
The GBV Sub Sector has received anecdotal reports from partners in various locations in relation to increasing cases of survival and/or transactional sex. Following these reports, GBV SS partners in five locations organized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with community members; specifically, women, girls, youths and community leaders. These discussions were placed within the contexts of understanding the risks and vulnerabilities that promote gender based violence broadly, as opposed to narrowing the discussions on survival and/or transactional sex. It is important to note that, traditionally, there is silence over experiences of sex especially in the context of violence or exploitation as this is clouded with community stigma, conspiracy to protect perpetrators, preserving family honour and fear of retaliation.

Information from the FGDs with community members was triangulated through desk review and field analysis of existing reports being observed from the Gender Based Violence Information Management Systems (GBVIMS). At the field level, data is either collected onto the standard intake form or using the mobile based Primero Software and transcribed into the Microsoft Excel-based Incident Recorder for analysis. Partners send their agency-specific reports to UNFPA for compilation, overall analysis,

1 The name of partners and locations have not been revealed in this report to maintain confidentiality.

Acknowledgements:
The Gender Based Violence (GBV) Sub Sector is grateful to the community members and their leaders who participated during these Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), to the partners and the frontline staff for providing useful feedback. Much appreciation to the organisations/agencies who provided technical inputs to this report. This field update is published in support of the GBV Sub Sector’s advocacy efforts.
and fed into periodic reports. GBVIMS Technical Working Group forums are organised monthly where the data collectors meet to conduct joint analysis and discuss the ‘stories behind the numbers. The last two meetings in July and August, 2019 were dedicated to discussion on SEA and survival sex.

**MAIN FINDINGS**

The GBV SS is not in a position to validate whether there is an increase in the trends for survival sex, as it is not reported as a standalone GBV incident. Six core types of GBV were created for data collection and statistical analysis using the GBVIMS, namely, Rape, Sexual Assault, Physical Assault, Forced Marriage, Denial of Resources/Opportunities/Services and Psychological/Emotional Abuse. Therefore, understanding survival sex and/or sexual abuse and exploitation is limited to understanding the motivation and context in which the incident occurs not the act of violence.

From January to June 2019, 17% of all GBV incidents reported accounted for sexual violence. Out of these incidents of sexual violence, 79% were acts of rape and 21% were acts of sexual assault. Further analysis of the context in which sexual violence occurred suggests that in 17% of all incidents of sexual violence reported, money, goods, benefits, and/or services were exchanged. It is important to note that cases of sexual assault, harassment and exploitation are grossly underreported because of community perceptions that tend make them subtle especially when it lacks physical harm and/or injuries. Many times, people are not aware that it is a form of GBV.

Reports from partners based on interactions with communities suggest that, women and girls are engaged in survival sex as an alternative means to fulfil the needs not met fully by humanitarian assistance including food (when it runs out and they have nowhere to get more until the next cycle), lack of condiments, fuel for cooking, lack of sanitary materials and other basic needs. The unmet needs are further exacerbated by limited livelihoods initiatives that provide access to safe income.

Adolescent girls, female child headed households, orphaned girls living with care takers, among others are particularly at risk. The risk of exposure of girls to GBV remains extremely high as they are at heightened risk of early marriage and child labour. Indications from community discussions reflect that girls are blamed for “consenting” to such sexual relations in order to get money to buy feminine/dignity/sanitary products. The helplessness of parents and care givers and their failure to provide the basic needs for their children is also mentioned. Some parents questioned why they should not give their young daughters out for marriage if they cannot adequately take care of their basic needs. A community member further revealed that it is the practice in one of the camps, for parents to give their daughter(s) out to spend the night with a man in exchange for one kilogram of rice.

Discussions with service providers reveal that very few of the survivors have the courage to report cases where they are forced into having sex in exchange for services by their own parents and care givers. In one of the incidents, it is reported that a parent locks her 13 year old daughter in the house with men who are willing to pay for sex. Whenever this is reported, and alternative care arrangements are made for the girl, she makes a case to the community leaders that her daughter is forcefully being taken away from her. The service providers are left with no option but to implement the directives from the community leaders to leave the child with her mother.

Most service providers only establish the context of the incidents when survivors and women and girls who are vulnerable or exposed to such exploitative situations come to seek for contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

---

2 GBVIMS Mid-Year Report, 2019 Snapshot. The data shared is only from reported cases and is in no way representative of the total incidence or prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) for data collection in the implementation of GBV response activities in a limited number of locations across Nigeria and with the consent of survivors.

3 FGDs held in August, 2019.
WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Of all the GBV incidents for which survivors sought help between January and June 2019⁴, 10% were perpetrated by business men within the communities, 1% by religious or traditional leaders, 1% by community leaders, 7% by community drivers/riders and 14% by armed security forces/groups⁵. Security personnel such as the police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), among others accounted for 1%. Other perpetrators were reported as government service providers/civil servants 3%, teachers 1% and NGO/UN/CBO service providers 1%. For 5% of the incidents, survivors recorded that the occupation of the perpetrator was unknown. However, years of interaction with survivors has revealed that this option is usually chosen by survivors who prefer anonymity in cases involving security personnel.

It is important to note here that, there is a lack of understanding on the concepts of intimate partner violence or domestic violence and what is considered SEA by aid workers. It is recommended that service providers need to be capacitated to identify and appropriately report cases of SEA.

There seems to be a correlation between locations where high numbers of GBV incidents are being reported and heavy presence of armed personnel – NSAGs and the armed forces. In addition, organized crime is also occurring in the camps alongside the actions of armed forces/groups. Reports were also received of organised prostitution rings, where persons popularly known as “magajias” are deliberately targeting young women and girls from the IDP camps and host communities for such exploitative arrangements.

In other locations, community members report that the security officers often use younger boys within the community to perform for them roles such as fetching water and polishing their shoes. The young boys are also sent to bring girls from the camp to the residences of security officers. In some camps, there are reports of young single mothers who were impregnated and left alone by military personnel who have since been relocated.

Another community member helplessly revealed that, “we normally see young girls going to the police officer’s residence, we hear their voices, but we cannot do anything about it”⁶. Most survivors that have been able to report or seek services mention that out of fear, women and girls comply to the needs of such security personnel and pray that they do not become pregnant⁷.

Discussions with women and girls who are returning from captivity have also pointed towards the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) for their role in promoting exploitative arrangements and/or relationships. The CJTF works closely with the military to enhance the security of civilian installations, and support the work of the military in manning several check points. It is during this time that some young women are targeted and sexually exploited and abused through intimidation that refusal to comply will lead to their screening as ‘high risk’ returnees.

In September 2019, the ministry of Justice in Borno State led an operation to demolish brothels within Maiduguri. Up to 32 women and girls who were found in very exploitative situations involving indoctrination through the use of illicit drugs were rescued. However, while this is a commendable step from the government, it is important to note that such operations need to be survivor centred, process centric and multi-sectoral and should ensure a strategy/Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in place to address the needs of survivors.

⁴ GBVIMS Mid-Year Report, 2019. The data shared is only from reported cases and is in no way representative of the total incidence or prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) for data collection in the implementation of GBV response activities in a limited number of locations across Nigeria and with the consent of survivors.

⁵ The GBVIMS consolidates data points on NSAGs and armed forces/military together. This is done as a safety precaution - to protect the service providers from retaliations and protect the confidentiality of the survivors.
RECOMMENDATIONS
As part of a system wide approach, the GBV Sub Sector calls upon all sectors, humanitarian leadership, donors and key stakeholders in government and security sector to join hands in reducing the risks to survival sex for vulnerable women and girls. Safe livelihoods, responsible and accountable provision of safety and security to most vulnerable, adequate and timely delivery of humanitarian services are key in reducing risks of GBV for women and girls. Specifically, the following Asks are made;

- Provide meaningful livelihood activities that target women (and men) providing them with a source of income and empowerment. The livelihood packages should incorporate re-integration needs of
  - women and adolescents formerly associated with armed groups as well as children born in captivity/of the conflict.
  - the needs of women/girls with special needs such as women/girls with disabilities, the elderly, among others.
- Enhanced Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) engagement with government and security actors through;
  - Advocating for and support to the Federal/State Government, the military and other security forces such as the police, NSCDC, CJTF to develop and implement a zero-tolerance policy towards GBV and SEA.
  - Similar to the HCT’s steps to implement zero tolerance policy on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by humanitarian personnel, calls for the government to commit to address and put in place relevant mechanisms to monitor the behaviour of civil servants, uniformed personnel and organizations that are operating outside a partnership with the UN/INGO framework in providing humanitarian assistance. The compliance and accountability mechanism/system should cover the spectrum of prevention, monitoring, and response.
  - Through the Civil-Military engagement, supported by the Protection Sector – including GBV Sub Sector and the PSEA Network; develop an Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) between the humanitarian leadership and the security forces that provide channels for beneficiaries to safely and confidentially report cases of GBV/SEA by uniformed personnel.
- Scale-up the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) leadership on PSEA:
  - Heads of organisations should recognize their responsibility, in fulfilling their mandates, to guard and protect vulnerable persons from SEA and to address such violations appropriately in their work. In particular, they must ensure their staff and partners do not abuse their power and influence to exploit and harm those they are meant to protect.
  - The GBV Sub Sector, in collaboration with the PSEA Network should build capacity of frontline responders and strengthen GBV case management and other specialised services to support survivors who seek services and appropriately report cases of SEA as soon as they are made aware.
- The Humanitarian Donor Community should ensure all organisations receiving funds and/or enter into partnership agreements implement a zero-tolerance policy towards SEA. Screening and vetting of eligible organisations, as part of their assessment should include internal measures for PSEA. They should ensure that funds are available to implement commitments towards protection from SEA and accountability to affected persons.
- The state governments should commit to strengthening capacities of relevant institutions to establish survivor centred, process centric and multi-sectoral responses to GBV and trafficking that follows comprehensive strategies, ensuring Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are in place to address the needs of survivors/victims.