Cyber-violence against Women and Girls and Femicide in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is about the examination of the relationship between cyber-violence against women and girls and femicide in Nigeria. It highlights how entrenched structural and cultural inadequacies contribute to gender-based violence, which has evolved from traditional forms to manifestations of online violence to offline violence as femicide. Using case studies from secondary data sources, the study analyzes the relationship between cyber-violence against women and girls and femicide in Nigeria, the effects of their use oo digital platforms, and state and non-state responses to the problem. The paper reveals that male dominance, stereotypes and poor enforcement exacerbate these issues, forcing women and girls to self-censor their online activities in order to safeguard their social and economic interests. The paper concludes that femicide emanating from digital platforms are on the increase in Nigeria and recommends that the legal frameworks on cybercrime be harmonized given the dynamics in cyber-enabled crimes in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cyberviolence, Femicide, Offline Violence, Digital Harassment, Gender Stereotypes

Introduction

The paper investigates the intersection of cyber-violence against women and girls (CVAWG) and femicide in Nigeria, emphasizing how traditional gender-based violence has evolved into digital fora. These online abuses, driven by sexism and misogyny, are increasingly prevalent and disproportionately affect women, exacerbated by the digital inequality gap (O'Brien, 2024; European Institute of Gender Equality, EIGE, 2025). This trend is rooted in structural and cultural inequalities, particularly disparities in access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) (EIGE, 2025).

CVAWG in Nigeria has escalated since 2010, initially involving non-consensual sharing of sexualized content and now including more severe cases whereby women are lured via social media, raped, and sometimes killed (*Premium Times*, 2012; *The Nation Newspaper*, 2014; *Cable News Network*, *CNN,* 2020; *Daily Trust*, 2025). This continuum of violence forces women out of public digital spaces, limiting their participation and opportunities (Wilk, 2018). While social

media platforms like Facebook are often the starting point, offline mobile communication through phone calls and text messages also facilitates such crimes, showing that digital devices, regardless of Internet access, can be tools for abuse.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) defines *femicide* as the intentional killing of females because of their gender, categorizing it into forms such as intimate partner and honor killings. These acts are influenced by complex sociocultural factors, societal norms, economic inequalities, and weak legal protections that further aggravate the situation in Nigeria. United Nations Women (UN—Women, 2020) highlights that women are primary targets of online violence, reflecting entrenched gender inequalities. This cyber-violence leads to fear, intimidation, and self-censorship, thereby discouraging women from engaging in digital spaces.

The anonymity of online platforms complicates the identification of perpetrators. Although some have been apprehended, many continue to commit these crimes with impunity, worsened by Nigeria's inadequate legal framework and ineffective law enforcement (UN—Women, 2020). While CVAWG has been studied, academic empirical research directly linking it to femicide remains limited, with most evidence drawn from media reports. To address this scholarly gap, this paper uses case studies from Nigerian media to establish the connection between CVAWG and femicide, assess its effects on women's digital engagement, and examine responses from both state and non-state actors.

While there is a growing amount of literature on CVAWG in Nigeria, studies that connect cyber-violence and femicide in the country are scarce. For instance, Onyemelukwe (2017) analyzed legal protections against gender-based cyber-violence, Sulva et al. (2023) examined how sexual violence is framed on social media. Nevertheless, while Posetti et al. (2021) established a clearer link between CVAWG and femicide, their study's focus on journalists leaves a gap in understanding the experiences of young women and girls who face cyber-violence due to their social and economic activities online. Moreover, most femicide cases linked to digital platforms in Nigeria remain documented only in media reports, lacking academic analysis and the implications of the forms of violence on women and girls participation in digital spaces for their social and economic development.

This study addresses the preceding gaps by providing cases of CVAWG leading to femicide in Nigeria, grounded in Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory. The paper provides evidence to inform academics, policymakers, and development partners about this digital-age shift in GBV, which, if unaddressed, could widen the digital gender division and hinder progress toward gender equality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, the paper provides answers to the following three questions (1) What is the connection between cyber-violence emanating from women and girls' engagement in online spaces and offline femicide? (2) How do CVAWG affect women and girls' participation in online spaces? (3) How have state and non-state actors responded to CVAWG and femicide?

The paper highlights the gendered nature of cyber-violence and its link to femicide in Nigeria and provides evidence of rising cases stemming from social media. The subsequent sections delve into the theoretical grounding using Galtung's Structural Violence Theory, the methodology, analysis and discussions based on the research questions raised, conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is grounded in the Galtung's Structural Violence Theory. Galtung (1975) formulated

the theory arguing that direct personal violence is only one of the aspects of violence, with structural (indirect) and cultural violence constituting subtler, yet no less damaging, forms of violence (see also Confortini, 2006). Galtung (1975) defined structural violence as the systematic exploitation that becomes part of the social order. He argued that while, on the one hand, personal violence is a tool for amateurs who specialize in expressing their dominance using guns, structural violence, on the other hand, is committed by professionals who engage the social structures in perpetuating their criminal activities. The structural factors that contribute to violence could be laws, policies, and societal influences (WHO, 2012). Differentiating between Galtung's theory, Schwarz (2019) noted that structural violence is enshrined into the system where it operates and portrays unequal power and unequal life opportunities. Gatung (1988), cited in Confortini (2006), noted that both direct and structural violence limit the need for bodily or psychological integrity, basic material needs (such as the need for sleep, movement, health, love, etc.), rights to freedom of expression, need for mobilization and work, and non-material needs such as friendship, happiness, and self-actualization.

Gender is an important aspect of structural and cultural violence since gender forms the structural basis for inequality in society (Caprioli, 2005). Structural violence thrives through socialization, gender stereotypes, and a constant threat of violence, all of which portray women as inferior (Caprioli, 2005). In intersecting structural violence and patriarchy, Brock-Utne (1989) divided structural violence into premature death due to inequitable life opportunities and reduced quality of life in which human potential is diminished, and noted that when women and girls experience structural violence because of their gender, patriarchal structural violence occurs. According to Galtung, patriarchal structural violence implies locating and analyzing the sociocultural, economic, and political systems that perpetuate or encourage physical, sexual, or psychological violence against women.

The intersection of direct or personal, cultural, and structural violence is key in understanding how online violence relates to offline violence. Cultural violence occurs in every facet of human life, ranging from religion, law, and ideology to science. Galtung defined cultural violence as aspects of culture that represent the symbolic spheres of human existence which can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Confortini, 2006). Structural violence is generated and sustained by cultural norms and provides a basis for the institutionalization of cultural violence (Caprioli, 2005).

Although Galtung's theory was originally applied to economic inequality, the theory is relevant in describing the intersection between CVAWG, which thrives on the failures of the social, cultural, political, and legal structures in society, and femicide. For example, in cases of CVAWG and eventual femicide, the perpetrators of the crime exploit cultural patriarchal tendencies by capitalizing on the feminist instincts of trust and friendship to lure their victims to spaces where they are exploited of their dignity or even killed. Additionally, the typology of violence identified by Galtung throws light on the intersection between CVAWG and rape or femicide, as the effect of one has a direct or indirect relationship with another or both. For example, while cyber-violence explores the structural failures in society, it has its roots in cultural norms and practices and the manifestation of the crime, although started in online spaces, culminate as rape or femicide offline.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on Nigeria using case study research design. Cases of CVAWG and their

intersection with different manifestations of offline violence reported between 2011 and 2025 were analyzed, highlighting the progressive and reoccurring patterns of manifestations of the problem.

Data were collected from secondary sources, particularly media reports (online newspapers). This choice was due to the scarcity of academic publications that have documented such cases in Nigeria. The media reports were however complemented with secondary data from articles and organizational publications to support the narratives of CVAWG and femicide. Documentary analysis is used to present the findings.

Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the case studies and discussions based on the objectives. The presentation is done thematically for the sake of lucidity.

Case Studies of Cyber-violence against Women and Girls and Femicide in Nigeria

Over the years, with advances in digital technology and expansion of digital spaces for social and economic engagements, an intersectional relationship has surfaced between CVAWG and femicide globally and in Nigeria in particular. The modus operandi of cyber-violence has evolved, taking different forms that are culminating in cases of femicide. The manifestations of CVAWG which has found its way into offline spaces in Nigeria range from sharing of sexualized images or videos of rapes or gang rapes, non-consensual sharing of sexualized private contents to cases of luring women and girls from online to offline spaces where they are raped or killed. This progression of offline violence from online spaces is presented to highlight the patterns of manifestation of CVAWG and its relationship with femicide in Nigeria. The cases align with the Galtung's theory which argues that the spate of violence in society is a function of the culture and structures in society.

Two types of modus operandi of CVAWG are presented in this section. While the first focuses on sharing sexualized images which may have psychological and traumatic effects on the victims, dynamics in digital abuse has shifted to cases whereby women are girls are lured or coerced under the pretense of friendship or deceived for economic opportunities and either raped or killed.

Sharing of Sexualized Images of Women and Girls

This case scenario manifests in two ways. In the first instance, videos of young women who, against their consents were gang-raped and the videos shared online present cases of a system that is culturally bereft. In 2011, a video of two young women who were gang-raped by a group of cultists was posted on Facebook (Daily Trust, 2011). In a similar case in the same year, the video of a lady who was gang-raped by five men was also circulated on social media platforms in Nigeria (Fisher, 2011). These two occurrences reflect an exploitation of the weakness of the young women in a society where male dominance is upheld, enabled by a misogynic system and disregard for the dignity of women.

In some other cases, women and girls have been victims of nonconsensual sharing of sexualized private contents on social media platforms in Nigeria, particularly Facebook. In 2016, the video clip of a young lady involved in lesbianism with another young woman was shared on

social media platforms in Nigeria (Vanguard Newspaper, 2016). In a similar incident in 2018, the scandal of the sexualized video of a pastor and a lady in Lagos State went viral (Punch Nigeria, 2018). Nonetheless, it was not established who was responsible for sharing the videos as both parties accused each other of sharing the video online. In 2019, sexualized videos of a 300-level undergraduate student at a private university in Ogun State and her 400-level boyfriend from a private hospital room in Abeokuta went viral, leading to the suspension of the student (The Nation Newspaper, 2019). While the male student was said to be receiving rehabilitation for drugs at the hospital and was visited by his girlfriend, the video was leaked by a third party.

In the case of the shared video of the students in the hospital, given that the complicity of the male friend was not confirmed, the scenario reflects a situation of exposure of both parties to public embarrassment. That is, both the male and female involved in such scandal are open to public shaming with the likelihood of psychological trauma, not only for them, but also for their families as well and as embarrassment for the university. The scenario also confirms that while women are emphasized as major victims of cyber-violence, especially on sharing of sexualized images, men are also victims of such crimes in society. Although denial by either of the parties involved as shown may not necessarily be the true situation, the possibility of a third party's involvement in the sharing of sexualized private contents implies invasion of people's privacy either for revenge or blackmail purposes.

The sharing of sexualized images of women and girls on social media carries serious social, economic, legal and human rights consequences. Socially, it reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and promotes the objectification of women, reducing their perceived worth to physical appearance. This often results in stigma, social isolation, and adverse mental health outcomes. Economically, victims may suffer reputational harm that leads to job loss or workplace discrimination. The non-consensual distribution of intimate images is increasingly recognized as a violation of privacy and dignity, with growing legal avenues for victims to pursue civil redress and compensation. But, in Nigeria, enforcement of such laws remains weak. From a human rights standpoint, this practice infringes on rights to privacy, dignity, and protection from GBV. Since women and girls are disproportionately targeted, it reinforces digital gender inequality and normalizing online abuse. In line with the Galtung's theory that highlights these crimes as enabled by structural failures in the society, combating this issue requires coordinated efforts through legal reform, digital literacy education, and grassroots advocacy to safeguard women and girls.

CVAWG does not have boundaries in terms of victims, since anyone can be a victim, irrespective of the geographic locations where a person lives (whether urban or rural) or social status (whether upper or middle class), as most of the presently reported cases of CVAWGs in Nigeria do not necessarily indicate that only those in urban areas are victims. While the limited infrastructure in rural areas may not draw attention to that section as a hotspot for the problem in the immediate, it is important to state that the use of social media platforms is not tied to locations and anyone, irrespective of where a person lives remains soft targets for these crimes, especially women who are mainly targeted. Furthermore, the growing utilization of digital technologies for social and economic opportunities for all classes of people in society also highlights the exposures of diverse social and economic classes of people in society to this social menace.

Coercion, Luring or Deceiving Women and Girls from Online to Offline spaces

Beyond the rising concerns of the sharing of sexualized images on social media platforms, the recent trend of CVAWG is the luring, coercion or deceiving of women and girls from online to offline spaces where they are either raped or killed. Cases of women who were coerced or lured from online to offline spaces on the deception of friendship and those who were deceived for economic opportunities and subjected to rape or killed are emerging as new patterns of cyber-violence as an enabler of femicide in Nigeria. Reported cases of young women lured from Facebook and raped are recurring, highlighting the seriousness of the shift in GBV from traditional forms to digitally-enabled forms.

In 2012, a young lady was almost raped by an assumed friend she met on Facebook, who invited her to his home in Lagos State and under the influence of drugs, attempted to rape and kill her with a bottle. The lady escaped by jumping from the third floor of the building, almost losing her life in the process, but for the early intervention of the security personnel (Vanguard Newspaper, 2012). In a similar incidence in 2014, a 23-year-old lady was gang raped by two Customs officers in Lagos. She met one of them on Facebook and visited him following his invitation, only to be gang raped by the "friend" and another colleague (The Nation, 2014). In another incidence in 2018, a young 23-year-old lady was lured by a friend she met on Facebook and gang raped in a hotel in Lagos. The lady, who was deceived by men who pose as women on Facebook was lured on the grounds of needing her assistance in establishing a fashion business, only to discover that the "female friends" were males (The Guardian, 2018).

In other manifestations, young women and girls are lured or deceived from social media platforms and killed, some after being raped. For example, in 2012, a young lady was lured by a friend she met on Facebook from Nassarawa State to a hotel in Lagos State, where she was drugged, raped by a gang of four men, and killed (Premium Times, 2012). The dastardly act was recorded by the gang on a mobile phone, a further abuse of her rights to dignity. In a similar case, in 2020, a 55-year-old woman was drugged and killed by three siblings in Abuja, Nigeria. She met one of the siblings on Facebook and was lured to visit him. She was killed and buried in a house which was said to belong to one of the perpetrators of the crime (Punch Nigeria, 2020).

Similar cases have also been reported more recently, highlighting the need for both scholarly and policy foci on the subtle but growing social problem. In 2024, the case of a 21-year-old student of Kwara State College of Health Technology who was reportedly set up by her friend who called on her mobile phone and introduced her to a male student in a private university and ended up being killed also portrays how digital technology is contributing to killing of young girls in Nigeria (Punch Nigeria, 2024). The remains of the young lady were found in a dump site in Ilorin, Kwara State. In a similar tragic event on February 10, 2025, a final-year student at a college of education in Kwara State was killed by a 29-year-old self-acclaimed Islamic cleric she met on Facebook (Nigerian Tribune, 2025). The young lady, who was in a naming ceremony in Ilorin received a call from the suspect; she left her food to answer the call and left the occasion to meet the assumed "friend" who turned out to be an enemy that ended her life. Her dismembered remains were found in the house of the man the following day following the search by the police. In a similar tragic event in Lagos, a young lady was lured by three purported "friends" from Facebook and killed after extorting 300,000 Naira from her (Daily Trust, 2025).

While the cases reflect exposure to femicide due to social interactions on social media platforms, cases of young women who have been killed on their quest for economic

opportunities have also been reported. The case of a young graduate who has applied for a job online and gone for the purported interview in the given address in Akwa Ibom State was reported in 2021. The young lady was raped and killed by the supposed "employer" (Premium Times, 2021). The suspect, who was said to be a serial killer, buried her in a shallow grave in his father's residence. It was the outcry of her friend whom she had briefed about the job interview before embarking on the unfortunate journey that led to the tracking down of the culprit.

The perpetrators of the highlighted cases are unrelated to the victims; they are strangers who exploit the vulnerabilities and powerlessness of the young women, causing them emotional or psychological trauma and in worse scenarios leading to their deaths. Gang-raping of young women implies domination for the perpetrators who operate in a society with poor legal systems to address the malaise, reflecting a social denial that is gradually becoming recurrent cases. In line with Galtung's theory, the failure of institutionalized structural and cultural systems reinforces an environment where these crimes thrive. Wilk (2018) observed that gender imbalance, inequality, and segregation contribute to the production and dissemination of content in social media spaces and reflect why women remain the victims of sexualized image sharing, either for shaming or revenge porn. As Internet usage increases, women and girls are at greater risk of being harmed online (Paradigm Initiative, 2021). As these social problems remain unchecked, the spillover effect on their lives and dignity becomes more glaring.

Whether it is a case of CVAWG whereby the private content of a woman is shared online as sexualized images, revenge porn, or the stalking or luring from online to offline space to perpetuate rape or femicide, these social misnomers in the society are indicative of the debasing to which women and girls are exposed in offline spaces that are either initiated or amplified online. While the motives of the perpetrators of these acts may differ, they reflect gender stereotypes and social reproduction of male dominance that put women at the receiving ends of abusive societal ills. Figure 1 reflects the intersecting role digital technologies in enabling CVAWGs due to the systemic problems of poor institutional structures and cultural stereotypes, either in isolation or in combination; they enable diverse manifestations of violence against women and girls through digital technologies.

The manipulation of women and girls through coercion, deception, or enticement from online platforms into offline encounters presents a growing and deeply concerning threat. This undermines not only their personal safety but also their trust in digital spaces, with far-reaching social, economic and legal consequences. These tactics often lead to physical or sexual abuse, psychological trauma, and enduring stigma. Victims are frequently blamed for their experiences, reinforcing harmful gender norms and silencing others who might otherwise speak out. This culture of silence and shame erodes the sense of agency and security that women and girls need to participate fully in both digital and physical environments. Also, the fear of exploitation can discourage women and girls from using digital platforms for job searches, entrepreneurship, and professional networking, digital tools that are increasingly essential in a digital economy. As a result, many are excluded from opportunities that could enhance their financial independence and social mobility, further widening the gender digital division. While coercion and deception may fall under existing cybercrime or trafficking laws, enforcement remains inconsistent and often inadequate.

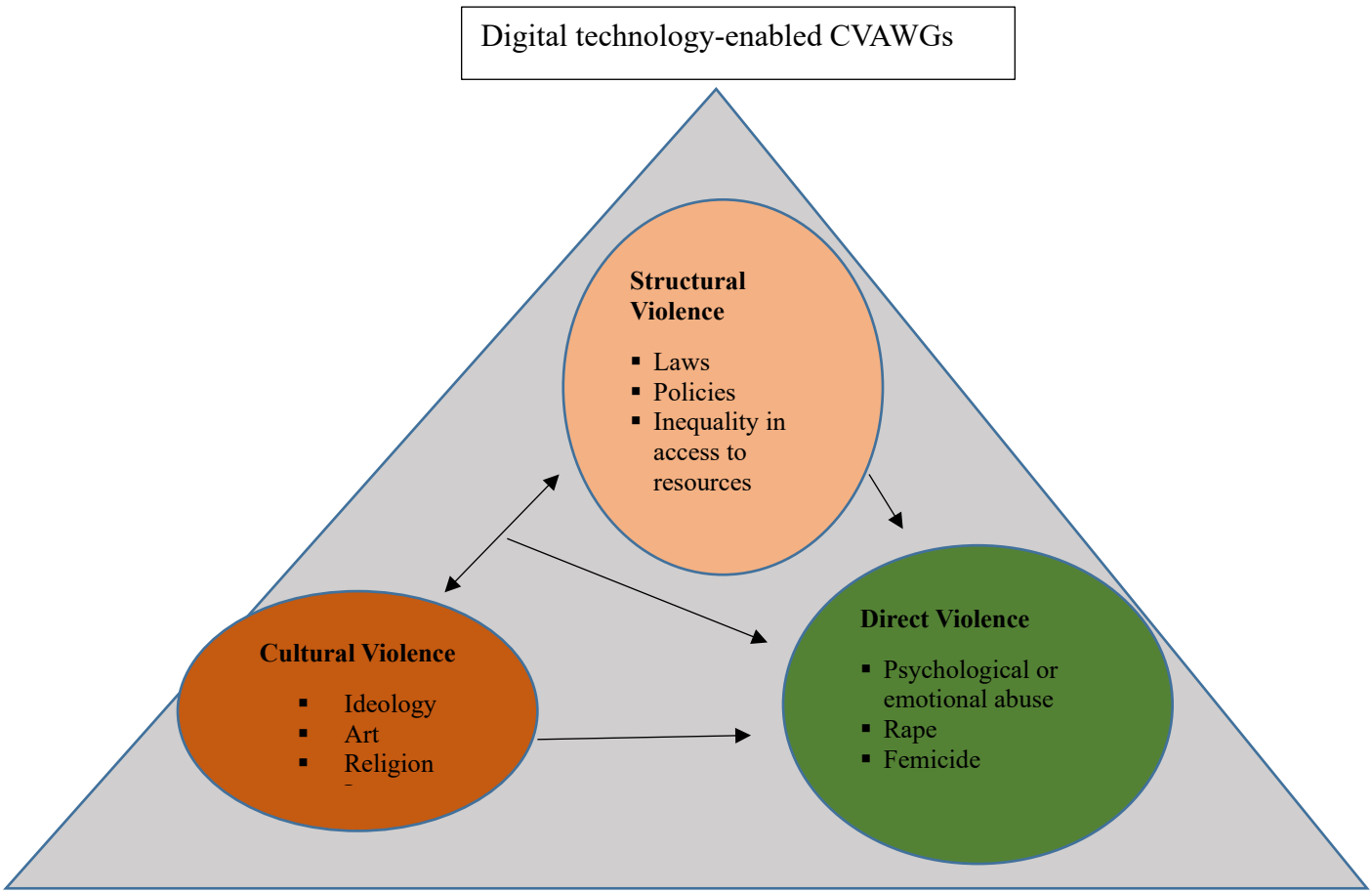

Figure 1: Relationship between CVAWG and Femicide
Source: Self-generated by the Author by Adapting Galtung's Structural Violence Theory

Effects of Cyber-violence against Women and Girls on Their Online Participation

How the individual or the society reacts to incidences of CVAWG, either as cases of sharing of sexualized images, attempted, or actual cases of rape or femicide, is a function of structural and cultural systems in place which serve as either direct or indirect enablers. The direct effects of a poor structural and cultural system have far-reaching implications on victims.

Perpetrators of the crime take advantage of the cultural system like patriarchy or religion that accord male dominance to abuse women online through harassment, sharing of audio and video content to shame them, or lure them from online to offline spaces where they are raped or killed. Religious beliefs in some parts of Nigeria that blames the abused woman on the grounds of impropriety as the cause of abuse has psychological effects on victims and their future digital interactions. Similarly, the failure to implement laws and policies that protect the rights of women paves ways for their exposures to cyber-violence. The eventual reaction from law enforcement institutions, their families or society, will determine the effects such negative experiences will have on their further interaction on online spaces.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are meant to provide innovative alternatives to traditional means of social interaction, economic empowerment and exploration of

opportunities for advancement. With the persistent occurrences of femicide and other forms of GBV that are engineered from online spaces, these can limit women and girls' ability to explore economic opportunities that are available online. As noted by Powell and Henry (2017), such scenarios may cause young women and girls to avoid promoting their businesses online or seeking professional networking opportunities due to fear of harassment and exploitation. In worse cases, the fear of being killed by unsuspecting perpetrators under the guise of friendship, employers or mere acquaintances could deny them genuine opportunities which are available to men. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC, 2012) noted that cyber-violence affects women in different ways depending on the context and identity of the woman involved, noting that women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of violence due to their profession, age, identity, or geographical location. CVAWG limits their ability to take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs provide for the full realization of their human rights. It acts as a barrier to their access to digital technologies, as women who suffer online abuse may not be predisposed to using digital platforms.

CVAWG worsens the gender digital gaps, reaffirms and reproduces gender stereotypes, and causes discrimination against women and girls, etc. (UNHRC, 2012; O'Brien, 2024; EIGE, 2025). CVAWG increases the existing gender inequality, as it limits their ability to benefit from online opportunities that men enjoy, such as employment, self-promotion, and self-expression, and results in unequal participation of women and men in online spaces, etc. (Powell et al, 2017). CVAWG has psychological, physical, sexual, or economic implications on the victims, as several women who are victims of the social malaise experience diverse forms of emotional trauma, injuries and in worse cases death as highlighted in the cases examined in this paper. It affects their participation in civic spaces as it establishes a society where women feel unsafe both online and offline. The self-esteem of victims of CVAWG is eroded and may contribute to their withdrawal from online and offline spaces, a kind of self-censorship that could limit their opportunities (UN—Women, 2020; Paradigm Initiative, 2021). This is already happening in countries like China, Mexico, and Afghanistan where women withdraw from using mobile phones due to harassment in online spaces (GSMA, 2015, cited in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, 2018).

The sharing of sexualized images of young women, whether taken with or without their knowledge, poses psychological trauma, given the spread of such content in the public space, as the stigmatization and shame associated with such may have lasting implications on their mental, emotional, social and even economic wellbeing. Onyemelukwe, (2017) noted that sharing sensitive videos of molested women leads to emotional distress and damage; apart from the trauma associated with the sexual assault, the sharing of either audio or video contents on social media spaces implies public exposure and spells mental torture for such victims.

The seriousness of the likely effect of femicide and other forms of GBV that emanates from online spaces can also be linked to the Structural Violence Theory of Galtung. In a cultural sense, instead of addressing the root causes of the problem, an abuse of online spaces that makes it uncomfortable for women to engage cultural and religious nuances. Women and girls are blamed for either inappropriateness in media engagements or for exposing themselves to such exploitations due to careless associations. Sometimes, social media comments portray such victims as "prostitutes." Pushing such narratives demoralizes victims of rape and traumatizes families of young women and girls killed due to their social or economic exploration of digital platforms.

These narratives of women as causes of their victimization do not hold true in a society

where stereotypes provide the males with some leverage that the females are not privileged to enjoy. For example, the young lady who was killed while seeking employment did not behave inappropriately by going out in search for a job. Nonetheless, such media condemnation has also been met with public backlash by the Nigerian public, especially feminists and women-focused organizations. Three instances of such deaths negate these positions. There were the cases of a young undergraduate who was killed while reading in a Church in Edo state during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID)-2019 period, a lady who wanted partnership for the fashion business, and a lady in search of employment. These ladies who were killed in the line of seeking opportunities for self-development suggest that being victims of these crimes were not because of their carelessness or inappropriate behavior. They were victims of a society where objectifying women for self-gratification is deeply rooted in a system of male dominance and structural failures because the perpetrators believe that they are anonymous to public scrutiny or judgment if they are not caught.

In the same vein, when justice is delayed due to poor legal structures or implementation of laws that protect victims from such occurrences, this will provide a thriving environment for perpetrators of the crime and thereby predisposes more women and girls to cyber-violence that culminates in femicides. Figure 1 also depicts how the interplay of structural violence enabled by weak laws, policies and inequality in access to resources and cultural violence due to ideology or religion in cultural settings result in direct violence that manifests in psychological/emotional abuse, rape and femicide. Where these structural anomalies are unaddressed, the spaces for women and girls to engage socially and economically become limited.

State and Non-state Responses to Cyber-violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria

The prevalence of CVAWG and femicide in Nigeria will depend on the embedded cultural and structural systems. This will in turn depend on the steps taken to address the problem by putting structures in place to prevent future occurrences or punishment for perpetrators to deter others. While these societal ills have received public condemnation as they occur, taking definite steps to address the problem is paramount.

The OECD (2018) amplified the need to develop measures to protect and prevent GVB online. Nigeria has ratified several international conventions that protect the rights of women and girls, such as the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was established in 1985, and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which provides for the promotion of women's safety and development in Africa, including protection against violence against women (Paradigm Initiative, 2021). The Nigerian Criminal Code Act criminalizes rape, with penalties of jail terms for offenders (Musbau, 2013). The Nigerian Constitution affirms the fundamental rights of every citizen, including the rights of women to expression, privacy, and protection against interference with these rights (Paradigm Initiative, 2021). There are also the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 (VAPP ACT) (Paradigm Initiative, 2021) and the Cybercrime Act (2015) and amended (2024) (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2024) with sections addressed to different forms of GBV.

The major challenge, however, remains the implementation and enforcement of most of these laws. For instance, the VAPP Act covers both online and offline criminal activities and criminalizes the coercion of a person to act to the detriment of an individual's physical or psychological wellbeing. As of 2024, 35 of the 36 states in Nigeria have adopted the VAPP Act,

indicating some progress at the state levels; nevertheless, implementation remains weak (Reliefweb, 2024). This was noted by Ikuteyijo et al. (2024) who stated that delays in family court systems, insufficient human resources, bureaucratic obstacles, and inadequate protection for survivors and witnesses are major obstacles that delay justice for victims of GBV in Nigeria

While the VAPP Act is the major legal framework to address all forms of violence in Nigeria, femicide is not covered by the Act as this is entrenched in the Criminal Code Act that is operational in southern Nigeria and the Penal Code Act that operates in northern Nigeria. The opposing customary and religious laws in Nigeria operated along the southern-northern division contributes to the poor implementation and uniformity in enforcement of laws to protect the rights of women (Paradigm Initiative, 2021). The Paradigm Initiative (2021) further noted that while the penal code criminalizes by publishing sexualized images for extortion, the "extortion" element of the law weakens its potency as it limits punishment to the extortion motive; as a result, ignoring the cases of committing the same crime for different intentions becomes the norm. Arguing that the customary and penal codes operated in the southern and northern parts of the country, respectively, are outdated, with the VAPP expanded to address their content, Amnesty International (2021) noted that one weakness in the VAPP is the absence of consent in the conceptualization of rape.

Apart from the VAPP Act (2015), the Cybercrime Act (2015) and amended (2024) focused extensively on all forms of cybercrime, including interception of electronic communication, willful misdirection of electronic messages, cyberstalking, which are dimensions of cyber-violence of which women and girls often become victims. Limitations have also been identified as affecting the effectiveness of the Act to address cyber-related crimes in Nigeria. Olufuye (2023) argued that the advisory council responsible for the operational implementation of the Act does not have the capacity to implement its provisions. Like the Customary and Penal Codes, the Cybercrime Act (2015) with its amendments (2024) still fails to address the intersectional effects of digital technology on women and girls, given the escalating problem of femicide culminating from online spaces. Entrenching the dynamics in digital technologies as an enabler of diverse manifestations of cybercrime that are culminating into increasing cases of femicide into the Cybercrime Act will inform the digital Nigerian public of the implications of such crimes. This will contribute to reduce the growing prevalence of the menace in Nigeria. Amnesty International (2021) noted that when laws are not implemented, perpetrators are empowered to commit crimes.

Additionally, the levity with which law enforcement agents handle cases of CVAWG, rape, and femicide in Nigeria has been described as a lack of political will on the part of the concerned agencies to tackle the problems (Amnesty International, 2021). Also, the systemic corruption among law enforcement agents poses limitations to efforts to curb the menace. Cases of law enforcement agents demanding bribes from families of victims have also been reported in Nigeria. In the extended cases of rape and femicide resulting from CVAWG, law enforcement agents have also been known to blame the victims for their ordeal. In the case of a young undergraduate who was raped and killed in a church where she went to study in 2020, the family of the young woman accused the law enforcement agents of demanding bribes before investigation (BBC Africa, 2020).

Situations whereby law enforcement agents blame victims as the causes of the molestation and abuse portray a stereotyping that encourages male dominance and establish convenient ground for perpetrators to operate. In such situations, women who experience any form of cyber-violence may not be fairly treated in the quest for justice, since the underlying

gender stereotypes that are embedded in the society may interfere in the handling of such cases. These limitations notwithstanding, Nigeria has made some progress in addressing some of the cases of femicide emanating from online violence. Although apprehending the perpetrators and ultimate justice might seem slow in the public's eye, some of the perpetrators were, however, apprehended almost immediately after the crimes were committed. Nonetheless, some perpetrators were apprehended after some years while others are still unknown. As examples, the man who killed the lady in search for employment in Akwa Ibom State was apprehended almost immediately because the lady had confided the prospective job in a friend. Similarly, the self-acclaimed Islamic religious leader who killed the young lady in Kwara State was also apprehended shortly after the family cried out about the missing lady.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The intersection between online and offline abuse of women, particularly the growing cases of femicide which in some cases are accompanied by raping the victims before killing them, portrays a new shift in cyber-violence against women and girls that constitutes a threat to their engagement in social media and other digital platforms. Where this is unchecked, the already threatened cyberspace that holds opportunities for self-actualization will further limit the participation of women and girls, thereby increasing the gender digital gap in Nigeria.

While the government has ratified international conventions to protect the rights of women, most of the laws are not enforced due to the poor political will of the government, conflicting laws that are implemented either along religious, cultural or geographic divisions, corruption of law enforcement agents, etc. further encourages the prevalence of the crime in the society. Although some successes have been made by the government in apprehending some perpetrators, NGOs have also played major roles in the successes so far. This has been achieved using hashtags that call for justice for victims that put the law enforcement agents on their toes, leading to some success.

Given the aforementioned results, this paper provides five recommendations to ensure that the menace, which appears to still be budding, does not escalate beyond manageable cases. The recommendations are as follows: (1) the Nigerian government needs to review its legal framework to integrate the customary and penal codes such that new dimensions of criminal offences, especially femicide that stem from CVAWGs, are clearly stated to drive appropriate punishment for perpetrators and reparations for victims; (2) the Cybercrime Act should further be amended to incorporate the dynamism of digital platforms given their role in offline violence like femicide which is becoming a recurring crime in Nigeria; (3) custodians of culture should begin to change the narratives that empower men to objectify women by establishing awareness in their domains that women are not objects to be exploited for sexual satisfaction, but individuals who should be dignified in the society; (4) law enforcement agents in Nigeria should ensure that cases of femicide or rape emanating from digital platforms should be treated with promptness as this may prevent the escalation of reported cases to deaths, which otherwise could have been avoided; and (5) given the success in apprehending some of the perpetrators due to the timely intervention of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by using hashtags, this should be prioritized by them and the Nigerian public that have been very supportive in reposting such hashtags.

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