



## EXPLORING CONTEXTUAL AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT AMONG FEMALE YOUNG PEOPLE IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Sexual assault poses a global threat, impacting victims, families, and societies both in short-term and long-term. This study aims to understand the contextual and individual factors contributing to the high prevalence of sexual assault among young females (aged 10 to 24) in Anambra State, Nigeria. Conducted as a descriptive qualitative study, data were gathered from thirty-one participants, including twenty-three stakeholders and eight rape victims, through two focus group discussions (FGDs) and thirteen in-depth interviews (IDIs). Recorded data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. The study identified eight major contextual factors influencing sexual assault: socioeconomic status, drug abuse, level of morality, policy implementation, insecurity, and unemployment. Significant individual factors include the occupation of young people, parenting style, dressing choices, educational institution affiliation, individual conduct, and indiscriminate use of electronic devices. The study concludes that policies aimed at revitalizing moral instruction in schools, curbing drug use, addressing indecent dressing, and regulating phone use among young people are crucial in controlling sexual assault.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sexual assault, female young people, contextual factors, individual factors, Anambra state.



## INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence encompasses a spectrum of non-consensual sexual activities, characterized by the application of force or coercion against an individual's sexual autonomy. This definition, as delineated by the World Health Organization (Mikton, 2010), includes acts such as rape, which is specifically defined as the forced or coerced penetration of the vulva or anus, employing a penis, other body parts, or objects. The term 'sexual violence' is frequently employed as a comprehensive descriptor for various forms of sexual victimization, including but not limited to sexual assault.

Particularly susceptible to such acts are children and adolescents, with a marked increase in vulnerability observed during adolescence, especially among female individuals. This assertion is supported by data from UNICEF (*Sexual Violence*, n.d.), indicating that in over a third of nations globally, at least 5% of young women have reported experiencing sexual violence during their childhood. Further, prevailing statistics suggest that approximately one-third of women are likely to encounter sexual violence in their lifetime, with 7% of these incidents involving rape or attempted rape (Wisevoter, n.d.). Notably, a study conducted in South Africa revealed that among female university students, the lifetime and past-year prevalence rates of sexual violence stood at 37.9% and 25.3%, respectively, underscoring the gravity and ubiquity of this issue in educational settings (Ajayi et al., 2021). Sexual assault encompasses a range of non-consensual sexual behaviors and contacts, including attempted rape, fondling, or any form of unwanted sexual touching. It also involves coercing a victim into performing sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetration of the perpetrator's body, and includes rape, characterized by the penetration of the victim's body (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, n.d.). Further delineation of sexual assault includes unwanted sexual contact that does not culminate in rape or attempted rape, like sexual touching and fondling ('What Is Rape/Sexual Assault?', n.d.). Rape is defined as unlawful sexual activity, typically intercourse, conducted forcibly or under coercion against a person's will, or with individual's incapable of valid consent due to factors like mental incapacitation or deception. This paper will use 'sexual assault' and 'rape' interchangeably, recognizing their overlapping definitions and implications (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

The Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) across sub-Saharan Africa report that, on average, 7.6% of women have experienced sexual violence (Evans et al., 2023). Nigeria shows the highest incidence of coerced sex among girls aged 15 to 19 years in the region. Despite this, Nigeria pioneered the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) in West Africa in 2014, with the Federal and State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development coordinating the initiative, supported by PEPFAR, the CDC, and the EU. Since 2015, there have been concerted efforts by international donors and the Nigerian government to combat sexual violence, including rape (Nigeria Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) Report, 2016). Between 2014 and 2023, NGOs such as Stand to End Rape (SRER), the Mirabel Centre, Hands Off, and Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF) have significantly contributed to this cause (Lewis, 2020).

A systematic review by Abrahams et al. (2014) analyzing the global prevalence of non-partner sexual violence from 1998 to 2011 revealed that in 2010, an average of 7.2% of women worldwide had experienced such violence, with Sub-Saharan Africa recording the highest prevalence at 38.4%. In the United States, data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in 2000 showed that 67% of sexual assault victims reported to law



enforcement agencies were under 18 years old, with 34% being underage (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). Ajayi et al. (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study in South Africa focusing on adolescent girls and young women, finding that the lifetime and past-year prevalence of sexual violence stood at 37.9% and 25.3%, respectively.

Further, Dworkin et al. (2021) in their systematic review encompassing countries including Africa, reported that the prevalence of sexual assault among women ranged from 0% to 59.2%. In Nigeria, a twenty-year retrospective study of rape found that <18 years were more likely to be raped by neighbors (Ajah et al., 2022; Mikton, 2010). A Nigerian study by Idoko found that at the ages between 12-34 are the highest risk years for rape and sexual assault. The highest prevalence of victims of sexual assault in Nigeria was in girls aged 13 years and above (Idoko et al., 2020). In an article that analyzed media reports in Nigeria, it was found that over 90% of reported rape victims were young female adults between the ages of 11 and 20 years constituted the highest percentage (46.1%) of the victims (Tade, 2020). A cross-sectional study of sexual violence among young women in Nigerian universities found that 39.5% of the respondents had experienced some form of sexual violence (Ajayi et al., 2021). A study on the prevalence of sexual assault in a teaching hospital in northern Nigeria using cases of sexual assault admitted into the hospital between January 2010 and December 2014 found 0.84% prevalence of sexual assault and about two third of the cases were female young people of below the ages of 12 years (Hassan et al., 2016). Amole et al. (2021) in their study on the prevalence of sexual abuse among female hawkers in Northern Nigeria found that the prevalence of sexual assault was 68.9%. Ohayi et al. (2015) in their study on the prevalence of rape in a teaching hospital in Southeast Nigeria found 8.8% prevalence of rape with the victims between the ages of 5 to 21 years and 74.4% were less than 18 years.

Previous research by Amole et al. (2021) identified age, ethnicity, education level, and familial living arrangements as key predictors of sexual abuse among female hawkers in Nigeria. However, there is a lack of descriptive qualitative research exploring the factors influencing sexual abuse among young females. This study aims to understand these factors from the perspectives of stakeholders and rape victims. The target demographic includes young females aged 10 to 24, in line with WHO's definitions of 'adolescents' (10–19 years) and 'youth' (15–24 years), covering the 'young people' age group (10-24 years) (World Health Organization, 2023). Understanding the associated factors of sexual violence is crucial for developing effective interventions.

## Design/Sample

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to address the research questions. Qualitative descriptive research is instrumental in elucidating the 'who, what, and where' of events or experiences from a subjective standpoint (Kim et al., 2012), thereby providing comprehensive insights into the phenomena under investigation (Doyle et al., 2020). Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Teaching Hospital (COOUTH) Research Ethics Committee in Awka, Nigeria. The research methodology included conducting two focus group interviews, segregated by gender, with nine participants in each group, encompassing men and women stakeholders. Additionally, thirteen in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted, comprising eight victims and five stakeholders. These stakeholders included community leaders, members, and policymakers, while the victims ranged in age from 10 to 24 years. This specific focus on young people aligns with existing research indicating that this demographic is particularly vulnerable to sexual (Bureau



of Justice Statistics 2000; Ezechi et al., 2016; Idoko et al., 2020; Tade, 2020). Furthermore, this age bracket is consistent with the target population for the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS).

The Anambra state Ministry of Women's Affairs and Child Welfare facilitated the recruitment of young rape victims for data collection. The semi-structured in-depth interviews with these eight victims included questions probing the circumstances leading up to, during, and after the rape incident, their perceptions of factors predisposing them to the assault, and their views on community and government interventions to control rape. Stakeholders were asked similar questions, focusing on community dynamics that may expose young females to sexual abuse or rape and potential risk factors specific to female young people.

### **Data Collection**

The principal investigator developed a biographic questionnaire to gather participants' demographic data and a semi-structured interview guide for data collection. All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator. Each focus group lasted 90 to 120 minutes while each in-depth interview lasted 15 to 45 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped with the participants' permission. During the interviews, the non-verbal behaviors and emotions of the participants were noted to complement the audio-recorded data. Data were collected from thirty-one stakeholders including eighteen community leaders, two policy makers and eight rape victims. The audio-taped data were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read severally to identify the key themes. The principal investigator developed a preliminary coding tree to organize the codes as secondary themes began to emerge. The interview transcripts were imported into NVivo qualitative software version 12 for thematic analysis. The principal researcher coded the data in NVivo. We also kept track of our analysis to ensure we did not lose track of the processes for quality assurance.

## **RESULTS**

The composition of respondents in this study included community members (58%), rape victims (26%), community leaders (10%), and policymakers (6%). Of the total respondents, a higher number were female (n=20) compared to male respondents (n=11). The age range of participants spanned from 10 to 70 years, with the eight rape victims aged between 10 and 24 years, and the 23 stakeholders ranging from 38 to 70 years. A significant majority (93%) of the stakeholders, encompassing both community leaders and rape victims (n=29), had resided in the community for over a decade. Educational attainment among the respondents was evenly distributed between secondary (n=13) and tertiary (n=13) levels. Living arrangements for the rape victims varied, with 61% residing with both parents, while 13% lived with either parent or a friend. Among the community leaders and policymakers, 60% had held their positions for at least two years. Detailed demographic information is presented in Table 1.

The majority (71%) of respondents were married, and this was uniformly the case among the stakeholders. During the interviews, participants in both the focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) engaged in discussions about the contextual and individual factors influencing sexual assault, as well as potential strategies for its control. From these discussions, we identified five themes related to contextual factors and six themes concerning individual factors. These themes are detailed below.

**Table 1: Participants demographic information (N=31)**

Variables	Variables	Number	Percentage
Participant type	Community member	18	58%
	Community leader	3	10%
	Policy maker	2	6%
	Rape victim	8	26%
Gender	Male	11	35%
	Female	20	65%
Age in years	10 - 24	8	26%
	25 -39	1	3%
	40 -54	5	16%
	55 – 64	7	23%
	65 and above	10	32%
Level of education	No formal education	0	0%
	Primary	5	16%
	Secondary	13	42%
	Tertiary	13	42%
Occupation	Dependent	5	16%
	Apprentice	2	7%
	Self-employed	3	10%
	Farmer	4	13%
	Public servant	10	32%
	Business people	6	19%
	Petty trader	1	3%
Marital status	Single	9	29%
	Married	21	71%
	Divorced	0	0%

### Contextual factors influencing sexual assault

The research identified several key contextual factors influencing sexual assault among young females, with socioeconomic status, morality levels, drug abuse among male adults, community insecurity, and employment levels emerging as prominent.

### Socioeconomic status

A primary factor impacting sexual assault is the socioeconomic status of the household. In instances where families struggle to provide necessities such as food, adequate housing, and education, young females become increasingly vulnerable to sexual assault. Stakeholders highlighted that poverty often leads to living conditions where young females cohabit closely with male siblings, escalating the risk of sexual assault. Inadequate housing conditions, including outdoor bathing facilities, were also mentioned as contributing to exposure to sexual assault. Additionally, the lack of educational opportunities and adequate nutrition were



identified as factors heightening young females' vulnerability to sexual abuse. A community member vividly described the situation: "*Poverty can lead young people into vulnerable situations where they might accept unwanted advances for financial support*" (RM 4, age 69, farmer).

Further emphasizing the role of poverty, a community leader stated, "*Crowded living conditions and outdoor bathing due to poverty significantly increase exposure risks*" (RL2, age 65, Public servant). Another stakeholder summarized the situation: "*Drug abuse, social media influence, poverty, and ignorance collectively predispose young females to sexual abuse*" (RM 7, age 62, traditional healer). A policymaker highlighted the dire consequences of poverty: "*In the face of poverty, young girls often find themselves at the mercy of men who exploit their vulnerability, sometimes for as little as 1000NGN*" (RP 2, age 55, Public servant).

From the victims' viewpoint, the living environment played a crucial role in their vulnerability. One victim recounted, "*Our residence in an uncompleted building made us easy targets*" (RV 4, age 14, apprentice). Another shared, "*A nightly visit to an external toilet led to an assault in an uncompleted building*" (RV6, age 12, dependent). A community member linked the broader economic situation to the increase in such incidents, employing an Igbo adage to illustrate the correlation between the deteriorating economy and the rise in crime and hardship, "*'A sina O na-abu chi foo Okuko enwee di' meaning as the day breaks and you witness the Nigerian economy going down, that is how crime and terror is increasing and hardship is multiplying while the economy is going down because there is no hard tackle*" (RM5, age 57, self-employed).

### **Perceived level of morality in the community**

The decline in community morality was identified as a significant factor contributing to the prevalence of sexual assault among young females. Stakeholders expressed concern over the perceived moral decay, noting a lack of community and parental engagement in moral guidance, particularly through religious teachings. The diminishing role of the church in character development was frequently mentioned. Stakeholders reminisced about the positive impact of church-led moral education in the past, contrasting it with the present situation where the church's involvement in guiding the youth's behavior, including attendance and attire in church activities, has notably waned. A community member posited that the rise in sexual assault cases is not primarily a result of poverty but rather a decline in religious morality. He recalled, "*During our schooling, 'moral instruction' and Catechism played a pivotal role in shaping character, but such religious training is now neglected*" (RM 3, age 58, businessman).

Echoing this sentiment, a community leader linked the high incidence of rape and related crimes to the neglect of early moral education. He stated, "*Ethical issues stem from the absence of moral instructions in schools, which traditionally guided young females on appropriate dressing and behavior*" (RL 1, age 60, Public servant). Another leader highlighted the church's diminished role in moral upbringing, lamenting, "*the church has shifted its focus to monetary gains, neglecting the moral classes and children's ministry that were essential in our formative years*" (RM 8, age 61, Public servant). Furthermore, a stakeholder advocated for the church to reassess its approach to moral teachings. "*The church should resume teaching Catechism, emphasizing unity, peaceful coexistence, and the grave consequences of actions like rape*" (RM 1, age 52, Public servant).



## Substance use among male adults

Substance use among the male population was highlighted by nearly all stakeholders as a major contributing factor to sexual assault. The consensus among respondents was clear: most sexual assault perpetrators were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offense. The negative impact of drug abuse on anti-social behaviors, including sexual assault, was unanimously recognized. It was noted that many perpetrators commit these acts while intoxicated with illicit substances. One community member expressed deep concern regarding the mental impact of drug abuse on young people, stating, *“Our children's senses are being eroded due to drug abuse”* (RM 5, age 57, self-employed). Another participant specifically identified methamphetamine, locally known as *“mkpuru mmiri,”* as a commonly abused drug among perpetrators. *“Those who commit rape, referred to as ‘Mabulu tupu’ in Igbo, are often users of ‘mkpuru mmiri’”* (RW 5, age 65, petty trader). Corroborating this view, another respondent linked the introduction of methamphetamine in communities to an increase in sexual abuse incidents. *“The prevalence of sexual abuse escalated with the use of ‘mkpuru mmiri,’ as it drastically alters behavior”* (RM 1, age 51, businessperson). This connection was further affirmed by another community member: *“Most of those who commit ‘mabulu tupu’ are under the influence of ‘mkpuru mmiri’”* (RW 9, age 65, self-employed).

## Lack of security

Lack of security is another factor that was mentioned that influences sexual assault. Participants expressed concern over the ineffectiveness of the community's security infrastructure, highlighting that the prevalence of rape indicates a significant safety issue. They emphasized the urgent need for better protection measures, particularly for young girls, who are among the most vulnerable. A policy maker felt that there is a breach of the security of life and even property because if people including female young people are in a secure and safe environment, the rapist will have little or no access to these girls. The policy maker simply said, *“if people are secure, they wouldn't have been raped, that is also a security issue”* (RP 2, age 50, Policy maker). A community member agreed that there is shortage of security to effectively secure the communities against things like rape. She stated, *“Insecurity is among the causes of ‘mabulu tupu’ because we don't have enough security. Like there are some places where these people usually operate, if there is enough security, the security agents can easily fish the culprits out”* (RW 3, age 38, petty trader).

Another community member explained that poor security architecture in the community has even made that even on the village road sides people can perpetuate rape on small girls that went for an errand, and everybody will go their ways. He reported, that,

*“The parents bought ‘Keke’ (tricycle) for their children, let me tell you; presently in our community, between 7:30 and 8:30 and above, you will see where they line up their Keke and these youth would be inside the Keke doing all manner of immoral things including sexually abusing our very young girls. I got the report from the security personnel recently. So, you see it comes in so many diverse ways and I am even ashamed of saying it as it is.”* (RM 5, age 57, self-employed)

Another community member explained more about the evil activities of the “keke” drivers in the community. He further reported, *“most times ‘keke’ people would abduct these girls and go and rape them, sometimes they keep them hostage, and sometimes they rape them for days”*



(RM 6, age 52, farmer). A rape victim also confirmed that there is a lack of security in the communities. She recounted her experience,

*“My mum later reported to the police station since then they have been after her. When my brother went to ease himself, he met one of the rapists that is called “Wotowoto”. After he went to ease himself, the boy told him that if he saw him again, he would shoot him “Wotowoto” meaning mercilessly”* (RV 6, age 12, dependent).

Another rape victim felt that the security men are not reasonable and effective in the way they respond to rape cases in the community. She lamented,

*“The security and the youth were not fair to her father when he took me to the perpetrator and was asking him why he did that to me. Some even went ahead to beat my father, pushed both of us and his machine. They took my father’s machine from him and parked it”* (RV 3, age 10, dependent).

Other victims believed that the security was not doing their work, or they were compromising. She narrated, *“No, the State Ministry of Women and Children affairs didn’t do anything even the police we reported to has not done anything”* (RV 6, age 12, student). Another victim believed that reporting to the security agency about an incidence of rape seems to be useless. As she lamented, *“We reported to the vigilante and youth, but the youths said that they would beat him, but they did nothing. They even saw him coming back but they did not do anything as they said...”* (RV 5, age 13, self-employed).

Another victim felt that reporting to the security agent may cause more harm than good because all your family members will no longer work freely in the community, and you will not be protected. A victim narrated,

*“My mother is now stranded; she doesn’t have where to stay because the man that raped me is chasing us to kill us because I told my mum and she reported to the police station. They told my mother that she would pay fifty thousand naira on my head and hundred thousand naira on my brother’s head”* (RV 4, age 14, apprentice).

### **Level of employment**

The participants revealed that the level of employment in society is a major contributor to the high prevalence of sexual assault. They lamented that most of the young people are not gainfully engaged, and they are also becoming very lazy. They constantly referred to an adage that says, ‘an idle man is the devil’s workshop’ meaning that when there is no meaningful thing running through the mind of a man, the devil will bring in evil thoughts which lead to bad devices like sexual assault. One of the community members said, *“There is a saying that “an idle mind is a devil’s workshop”. If a child is idle or an adult is idle, most of the time they are prone to such acts and at any given avenue, they would exploit it”* (RM 9, age 48, businessperson). Another community member believed that the first thing is to pray to God and make an effort to engage the young ones. The stakeholders suggested by saying, *“Let us find the face of God and keep our young ones busy at all times so that there won’t be an avenue for the devil to come in”* (RM 8, age 61, public servant).





Another community leader reiterated that it is only when an adult occupied his mind with reasonable thing in his workplace that he would not be prone to perpetrating sexual assault. He emphasized,

*“From my point of view, it is said that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. When someone is idle, the mind starts wandering and from there starts to entertain evil thoughts and desires. If he doesn't think of breaking into someone's house to get money for womanizing, he thinks of money to smoke weed, “mkpuru mmiri” and the likes all leading to sexually assaulting young girls. So, idleness contributes to all these bad things”* (RM 7, age 62, self-employed).

Another community member was emphatic that the cause of increase in sexual assault is joblessness among our young adults. He confirmed that,

*“It's becoming common because people are becoming idle and lazy. Another thing is that students don't study again. Even University students are on strike which made them idle and increases rape cases not only in one community, but you also see it in the news”* (RM 1, age 52, public servant).

A community leader believed unemployment affected everyone including the female young adults. Consequently, the female young people are sometimes desperate to get employment which paves way for these perpetrators. One of the respondents lamented that,

*“... a lot of the eh...predators take advantage of these innocent, helpless, vulnerable girls because they know the rate of unemployment in the country, some of them will even advertise when they come for this thing, they use that opportunity to rape them, sometimes even those that employ them to do sales girls for them, they rape them”* (RM 2, age 69, farmer).

### **Individual Factors**

Some of the individual factors that the participants reported are the occupation of the female young people, parenting style, mode of dressing, affiliate education institution, and individual conduct.

#### Occupation of young females

The occupation of young females was a prominent factor identified by participants. They noted that girls engaged in petty trading or similar activities are at heightened risk of sexual abuse due to a lack of supervision. One community leader opined, *“if you cannot go to school, you go learn a work. When somebody from the morning is busy... There won't be a need for her to be roaming about the streets or the road at night. Like what we see these days”* (RL1, age 60, public servant). The vulnerability of young female hawkers was a specific concern, as one member stated, *“The major cause is hawking by children. They suffer it most... They will give them money and tell them not to tell anybody what happened”* (RW 9, age 65, self-employed). Another community member agreed that hawking business exposes mostly young female people to sexual assault. She supported this by saying, *“Those children that hawk around suffer it most, even though it happens to adults but are mostly young girls; the young girls that hawk groundnut and other things.”* (RW2, age 75, farmer). Another community member explained further that those people that claim to be their customers have ulterior motives. She reported that, *“In most cases, you will see construction workers asking them to bring their goods to their site. They ask them to cost all the goods and even go as far as paying them more than the total*



*cost of their goods just to woo them to their side and abuse them” (RW6, age 60, public servant). One of the victims believed that it was because she was not doing any meaningful work that she was exposed to sexual assault. One of the victims lamented, “My mother died, and my father stopped taking care of me. I am living with my boyfriend, and he has no money to help me to start something. I needed money to start hairdressing.” (RV8, age 15, unemployed).*

### **Parenting style**

Parenting style was identified as a crucial factor affecting the prevalence of sexual assault by the participants. The participants stressed the importance of proper upbringing in preventing deviant behavior in children. They insisted that family is the first organ of socialization for man and if parents left their duty may be for material things the children from that family will grow to be a problem to society. It was also pointed out that the way a mother or father is behaving influences the behavior of the young people and the relationship of the children with the family and society. The effect of extramarital relationships by mothers was also pointed out as one of the reasons for sexual assaults seen between father and daughter. A policy maker believed strongly that the way parents bring up their children determines how they will behave when they grow up. The stakeholders said, *“The upbringing constitutes ninety-eight percent of the problem” (RP1, age 50, public servant).*

Another policy maker explained that there are some mother who through their demand and expectations from a young adult, may push the girl child to be exposed to sexual assault so that she will make her mother happy. She was of the opinion that when a girl child is still under training both formal education and skill acquisition, she should be encouraged without demands until she is employed. The policy maker gave an example of bad parenting in this way,

*“Bad parenting is like when you see a mother, you send your child to university, your child will be in school, and you will be expecting your child to be buying gifts for you. From where, how? Does it mean that lecturers will teach and after teaching will give them money? So you see some mothers, like this one come from mothers, basically from mothers. They wouldn't want to exercise patience and allow their girl child to at least finish university education, or higher institution, and get a job. Then you start enjoying the fruit of their labor, you want to start enjoyment without laboring. Ezigbo ada, good girl, get me the phone. Ada na-eri ukwu anu, o buro ma nwa and all that should be getting you gifts without you asking what the source of this money is that this girl is bringing into my house” (RP 2, age 55, public servant).*

A community member complained that some parents are not interested in what their children do. They are occupied with strategies to make more money to the detriment of the lives of children and society. A stakeholder lamented that,

*“The major issue is that most parents have washed their hands off their children because you can't imagine that around 4:30 am, both parents will take their bath and leave for their daily businesses. Some would even give them money to buy food from vendors but in the olden days you first took care of the children before going out. So parents are not after the welfare of their children but after wealth, money and investments so based on that, the parental care is eluding Igbo man” (RM 8, age 61, public servant).*



Another community member was emphatic that when a girl child is brought up in the right manner by her parents, that child will comport herself in a way that she will not be exposed to sexual assault. A community member observed,

*“I am looking at where parents are too busy, they won’t be there to know what is happening to their children. They are not sensitive. So when they are falling, when they become sex slave and eh...become victims under the hand of this perpetrator, they may not even know that this thing is going on maybe until one way or the other after might have been very long and late before they know what is going on, but if they were available to protect their children enough...”* (RL 1, age 60, public servant).

A community member believed that if parents correct their children at home for wrong doings, those children will grow to live a decent life that will reduce their exposure to sexual assault. He explained with an Igbo adage that says,

*“A si na, a na-ebido na uno di mma wee pua na-ilo.” meaning charity begins at home. There are some mothers that will observe that their children are misbehaving, they might receive friends in their absence, take for instance she is a girl child, and the mother would not bother to know the kind of friend but will be quick to remind them of the friend's visit, that is misleading or wrongly encouraging her to misbehave”* (RM 5, age 57, self-employed).

A community member expressed surprise by what some mothers teach their children even dressing. She complained, *“Most of our mothers’ dress anyhow to the market and their children do join them. You will see mother and child wearing bum shorts and moving around”* (RW 6, age 60, public servant).

A community member also believed that extramarital relationships, especially among mothers, is the cause of incest which is rampant in the state. He reported,

*“There are so many children who think their father is their biological father, but they are not. Extramarital affairs by most wives end in pregnancy, it is assumed the child belongs to the husband and he takes up the responsibility. But in the real sense the child is not related to the father leading to sexual attraction of the father to the assumed daughter”* (RM 3, age 58, businessperson).

### **Indecent dressing**

The manner of dressing among young females was frequently cited by participants as contributing to sexual assault. Some of the respondents stated that young girls are supposed to cover their bodies appropriately when they are outside. Exposure of their private areas to male adults can lead to sexual assault. A respondent reported *“My first observation is that female dressing is inappropriate, their new fashion is nude”* (RM 8, age 61, public servant). Another respondent continued,

*“The kind of fashion in vogue now is nonsense both married and unmarried and these kinds of dressing can provoke the males who are under the influence of substance to approach them, and if they resist the advances, he can plan to have her by force.”* (RM5, age 57, self-employed).



One participant believed that there are some dresses that attracts sexual assault. He explained, *“There are some kinds of erotic clothing that a female child would wear, and it would get the negative attention of the opposite sex”* (RM 6, age 52, farmer).

A community member explained that the major driver of sexual assault is indecent dressing. He said, *“the types of sexual assault or incident of sexual assault that is prevalent today, starts from the dress code, the way our young people dress”* (RM 1, age 52, public servant). A policy maker affirmed that what men see attract them so the way you dress can attract a man for good or bad, they stated,

*“Yes! Is it not the things that men see that attract them? If you decide to be naked, you will see people who are drug addicts who wouldn't have the strength to stop themselves or control themselves. They will give it to you”* (RP 2, age 55, public servant).

A rape victim believed that her outfit may be a major factor that led to the rape incident. She reported that, *“That day I wore earrings and a nose ring, but he said it was because of my dressing that made him think I would like it”* (RV1, age 24, student).

### **Educational institution**

Most of the participants expressed that the educational institution influences the prevalence of sexual assault. Some participants expressed concern about the disregard of moral instructions in some schools. The participants believed that if the school teaches moral instruction and history, the students will not only understand what is right and wrong but know the consequences of indulging in a negative lifestyle from history. The participants also expressed concerns about community secondary schools and the proliferation of private schools. One community member believed that the introduction of community secondary school in the state increased sexual assault because young people do so many things together in the school. The community member explained,

*“Schools have a major contributing factor to sexual assaults on girls. When we were growing up, I went to a boys' school; then mixed schools were not so common. Later, one of our major schools here was converted to a mixed school. There were cases of sexual assaults because these cult activities started in schools, either luring the girls or they knew how they were able to carry the girls to a bush and assault them sexually”* (RM 1, age 52, public servant).

A community leader agreed that community secondary school exposes female to activities that will lead to sexual assault. He pointed out,

*“Yes, I think so. Like co-education can increase the chances because even in the class they will start having friends (male friends). Leaving young ones of opposite sexes to stay together allows them to see their nakedness, play with this and that and things start happening from there leading to a lot of overlapping and disastrous effects”* (RL 2, age 75, public servant).

Another community member believed the moral decadence in school in recent times is worrisome. There are little or no strategies to discipline young people in schools thereby creating an enabling environment for all manner of irresponsible behavior in society. Yet, when parents are away for business, these young adults are in school throughout the day. One community member stated,



*“... schools contribute to this issue on the ground, and I think they are a major factor because when children leave their homes to school, the schools are supposed to be their second mother or father to their parents. During our days in school, if one committed an offense in school, he would be punished and if he persisted, he would be expelled from the School it would be difficult for that individual to be accepted by other schools because he would be asked to present a transfer certificate because he formal school would give reasons for his exit from the school where they would indicate his attitude and performance. So, no school would accept him so he wouldn't corrupt their students” (RM 7, age 62, self-employed).*

Another community member felt that the teacher's attitude to duty at school is also a contributory factor. He stated that *“Schools also contribute. Firstly, some of the female teachers with nonchalant attitudes in public schools have made it easier for young girls in schools to receive male visitors in schools” (RM 4, age 65, public servant).* A policy maker was of the opinion that the most important thing is how the school is inculcating moral principles in the young people. She summarized by saying, *“School contributes too much, too much. When you get your child into a school that doesn't know anything about morals. Whether single or mixed school, it all depends on the morals you are inculcating in the children.” (RP2, age 55, public servant).* Another community member believed that most private schools are more interested in the population size of their schools. Consequently, they are economical in giving appropriate punishment for proper training of young people. A participant stated, *“Some schools do contribute, especially some private schools that lack discipline. They don't discipline the kids like flogging or other punishments when they misbehave in order to maintain a high population. I have gone for supervision to a private school and on getting to the urinary to ease myself; I saw boys carrying and wrapping girls anyhow. Some of them allow the students to sew anything as a school uniform; hot mini, contour showing, leggings and everything that reveals the body. The boys may now lure the girls in the canteen after school to do what they like” (RW6, age 60, public servant).*

### **Individual conduct**

Most of the respondents stated that the behavior of a female adult is also a major influence on sexual assault. They explained that some female young adults, despite the good parenting and family background, can develop ‘bad’ character on their own. Participants stated that some of these girls will be misled by their peers or teachers leading them to behave in delinquent ways. The participants believed that the ‘ill-behaved’ female young people could be disobedient to their parents and discontent which would expose them to sexual assault.

A community member explained that sometimes children behave as they like, despite being raised by their parents to not engage in risky behavior. A community member lamented,

*“A priest can train his children to be useful but his children despite all the training might still be wayward, will you arrest the priest? No! So, what I am saying is that some are from the mothers, some are not from the mothers. Some will get used to flogging both male and female and still be misbehaving. Hence flogging they will flog him/her, some when you flog them, they will feel it while some will not feel it. So what I am saying is that friends contribute a lot in misleading our children both male and female.” (RW1, age 65, business person).*



Another community member believed some female young people are not content with themselves. Therefore because of this discontentment, they will fall prey to the perpetrators of rape. The community member said,

*“The point I want to raise is that our girls are prone to begging, they long for what they can't afford. Any young girl who has this habit will always end up with one problem or the other. If you observe keenly, you will notice how our young girls are flocking around young bike and tricycle drivers making one request or the other, they have insatiable hunger and demand. Any man that you keep demanding things from, will someday think that you owe him something so it's either you give it to him peacefully or he will collect it by force from you”* (RM5, age 57, self-employed).

Another community member reiterated that over stimulation could lead female young people to being a victim of rape. She explained,

*“Another thing is that these girls are overstimulated (oke akpili). They always want to go where they share/give money to them, where things are happening, or jungles where they hang out for drinks and other things, and on reaching such places, the case is no longer the same. The bad boys can assault them and use them anyhow they like.”* (RW6, age 60, public servant).

### **Indiscriminate use of electronic devices and social media**

Some participants said that one of the major influential factors to sexual assault among female young adults is uncontrolled access to the electronic devices and social media. Stakeholders were unanimous in their statements that electronic devices including phone and television exposes the female young people to incomprehensible information for age to abnormal behaviors that exposes them to sexual abuse.

A community leader stated that what the young people view through all forms of social media is a major contributor to the high incidence of rape. As he submitted,

*“Social media and phones I feel make our young girls vulnerable to these acts. We should look into how these young ones engage in these social media apps: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram because those are the places the youths are being exposed to strangers ...leading to sexual assault.”* (RM3, age 58, businessperson).

Another community member reiterated on the use of phone by young people as she stated:

*“It appears to be increasing because of what the youths are exposed to through phones. When you turn on the television, you will be seeing nude everywhere, this increases people's urge to engage in illicit activities...”* (RM4, age 65, public servant).

A community member felt that nonselective use of phone and social media make the young girls to fall victim of rape. She said, *“What I want to add to this submission is phones. The social media and these phones makes our young girls vulnerable to these acts”* (RW3, age 38, trader)

A policy maker strongly supported that social media has a negative effect on the prevalence of sexual assault. The policy maker explained,



*“Hmm, to be honest with you, I think that one of the things that does that is that recently, youths, young men are exposing themselves to watching pornographies in their handsets and devices and a lot of... ..libidos they have stared up through those things and young girls and women and young women now fall victims in their hand” (RP1, age 50, public servant).*

Another community member expressed worry about access to phones by young people, even children are not left out, *“...you will find a child that is exposed to so many things through this type of phone that is commonly used now. A child of 7 years old could operate our phones even to the best of our knowledge and whatever they see on those devices is what they envisage even in their dreams” (RM 6, age 52, farmer).*

A community member agreed that sexual assault is not alien to the community, but indiscriminate use of electronic devices and social media has made rape a state of emergency in our society. He explained, *“Rape didn't start today... but the only difference is that it appeared to be increasing because of what the youths are exposed to through phones, when you turn on the television, it will be seeing nude everywhere, this increases peoples urge to engage in those illicit activity” (RM 4, age 65, public servant).*

A community member pointed out that some female young people are lured to some centers where they will be exposed to seeing these exciting films. She explained, *“Some are viewing centers where they watch films and other things. They entice the children with money, they will tell them maybe to buy biscuits for them and before you know it, they will rape or assault them” (RW 6, age 60, public servant).*

Another community member felt that watching films that are not good for age can lead young people to practice what they see there by exposing themselves to sexual assault. The participant explained, *“Another thing that contributes is watching bad films, maybe after watching, they will now practice what they have seen in the film because it was not like this when these films were not there” (RW 7, age 70, public servant).*

## **DISCUSSION**

Our study identified several key contextual factors influencing sexual abuse in Anambra State, including socioeconomic status, insecurity, drug abuse, level of morality, and unemployment. Our finding that socioeconomic status influences the prevalence of sexual assaults is consistent with the finding of another Nigeria study that revealed that the socioeconomic status of parents is a strong determinant of sexual abuse among young girls (Busari, 2016). Socioeconomic status is explained as a complex concept that involves education, income, overall financial security, occupation, living conditions, resources, and opportunities afforded to people within society (American Chemical Society, 2023). In our study, socioeconomic status constituted living conditions, inability of the family to provide basic needs of female young people and location of residence. Our finding is in line with a quantitative study in Nigeria that found adequate family financial support was protective against sexual violence (Ajayi et al., 2023) and other qualitative studies outside Nigeria revealed that the socioeconomic status of women has a significant influence on rape (Bailey, 1999; Runarsdottir et al., 2019).



We also found that drug abuse influences the prevalence of rape among female young people. This is consistent with the findings of other studies that found that the perpetrator of rape was using drugs or alcohol (Basile et al., 2021; Black et al., 2001; Martin et al., 2011; Njideka, 2020). Level of morality was also found as a major factor influencing the prevalence of rape in this study. This is not surprising because rape has been conceptualized as an act of violence rather than sex (Maung, 2021) as such morality leads to decreased violence (Cousar, 2021). The finding corroborates with the finding from another study in South Africa that found being religious as a major factor that controls young girls experiencing sexual assault (Ajayi et al., 2021, Amole et al., 2021). Religiosity was also found to be a protective factor for youth sexual behavior in another study in Nigeria (Somefun, 2019).

Our study also revealed individual factors including occupation of the female young people, parenting style, indecent dressing, affiliate education institution, individual conduct, and indiscriminate use of electronic devices and social media as major factors influencing sexual assault among female young people. In our study, having a child from extramarital relationship, not having enough time for your children, parents' insensitivity about the activities of their children and not teaching the children moral principles were part of parenting issues causing exposure to sexual assault among young girls. This finding is consistent with another finding from a similar study that found relationship factors like supervision by parents, and being in a family where the mother's spouse is not the child's biological father as some of the major risk factors for a young girl being sexually assaulted (Black et al., 2001; Martin et al., 2011). Occupation of young people like street hawking was also found as a major factor that exposes them to rape in our study. This is consistent with other studies in Nigeria that found on average 68% prevalence of sexual assault among female young street hawkers studied (Amole et al., 2021; Busari, 2016). We also found that indecent dressing of female young people exposes them to sexual assault. Our finding corroborated with a related study in Israel by Moor (2022) among university students where men believed that women's primary intentions for wearing sexy dress were temptation and seduction. Another author also noted in his study that dress conveys information related to various aspects of sex like likelihood of being sexually harassed, intentions concerning sexual activity (Lennon et al., 2014). Our finding also agreed with other studies in Nigeria that found indecent dressing as a major factor that heavily contribute to the spread of rape in Nigeria (Akinade et al., 2010; Njideka, 2020; Oli, 2017). We found that affiliate education institution of female young people is one of the major factors that influence sexual assault. This is in line with the findings of another Nigeria study that found a 13.3% prevalence of in-school rape among adolescents (Ezegwui et al., 2023). In fact, the incidence of rape in schools is becoming rampant as this is reported almost on a daily basis by Nigeria's national dailies. For instance, most recently, there was a report that 34-year-old mathematics teacher raped two young girls in secondary school in Nigeria (Abdullahi, 2023) and a school proprietor raped a four-year-old girl (Ugwu, 2023). The study also revealed that indiscriminate use of electronic devices and social media is one of the major factors influencing sexual assault. This is in line with a previous finding that found a relationship between pornography and violence against women (Bergen & Bogle, 2000; Powell, 2019). A Nigeria's study on the consequences of social media use among adolescents found the consequences to include propagation of indecent dressing, sexual abuse, premarital sex, hookup, sexting, pornography and sexual solicitation (Aleke et al., 2018).





This study has a limitation in the number of rape victims that participated in the study because of the sensitivity of the topic. Recruitment of the victims for the study was highly challenging.

## CONCLUSION

There are multidimensional factors influencing the prevalence of sexual assault among female young people in Anambra state. Therefore, it requires a multi-sectoral approach to comprehensively control the menace including religious, community and government sectors. There is a need for synergy between the community structure and the government for effective culturally sensitive policy making and implementation.

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