

Assessing Social Media Influence on Nigerian Youths' Knowledge, Awareness and Attitude Towards Anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Legislative Provisions

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of social media on Nigerian youths' knowledge, awareness, and attitudes towards legislative provisions aimed at combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Nigeria. Despite legislative efforts, FGM remains a prevalent practice in Nigeria. This research employs a quantitative method using a descriptive survey with a sample size of 477 Nigerian youths aged 18 to 42 who are active on social media. Among the respondents, 76.3% are female, and 22.9% are male. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered online via Google Forms, with links distributed through social media platforms to reach youths across various regions of Nigeria. Data analysis was performed using simple percentages and presented in pie charts. The study is grounded in the Knowledge Gap Theory. The findings reveal poor awareness and understanding of the VAPP Act 2015, even ten years after its enactment. The study recommends multisectoral and multichannel efforts to combat FGM, including educational campaigns and community engagements to complement existing legal provisions. It also suggests involving social media influencers and content creators to enhance awareness and understanding of the anti-FGM legislation.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Knowledge Gap Theory, educational campaigns and community engagements, awareness, and attitudes

Introduction

Nigeria, being the most populous black nation in the world, has a large youth population. These youths are often interfacing with new media technologies, especially social media. According to statistics, the population of youths is approximately 64 million; while those who interface and interact online across social media platforms are around 33 million (Statista, 2023). More often than not, social media wields much influence in their day-to-day life.

One therefore wonders if social media platforms help create awareness and influence the attitude of Nigerian youths towards the legal provision against the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Female genital mutilation has often been described as female circumcision or female genital cutting (World Health Organization, 2022). It is seen as a traditional harmful practice that entails the partial or total cutting away of the female genitalia for no medical reasons (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Female genital mutilation/cutting remains prevalent across the globe with about 4 million girls being at risk of undergoing FGM annually with its severe consequences on their livelihood (Libretti et al., 2023a). The practice is said to be prevalent in the southern and eastern regions of Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2018). On the international scene, it is seen as one of gender-based violence and as such, a violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls (United Nations, 2020).

In a bid to curtail and possibly stop this traditional harmful practice, the Federal Republic of Nigeria enacted and passed a bill that prohibits and criminalizes the practice of FGM. The Act which is known as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 was signed into law by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in May 2015 shortly before leaving office. According to the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, the law prohibits female circumcision, forceful ejection from home and harmful widowhood practices. It prohibits abandonment of spouse, children and other dependents without sustenance, battery and harmful traditional practices (acdhrs, 2015). www.acdhrs.org/2015/06/nigeria

Some of the key provisions of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act include:

1. Prohibition: the VAPP (Prohibition) Act explicitly prohibits the practice of female genital mutilation. It states that no person shall excise, infibulate or otherwise mutilate the whole or any part of the labia majora, labia minora or clitoris of another person.
2. Punishment: any person who performs FGM is liable upon conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding four years or a fine not exceeding N200,000 or both. If the act

results in the death of the victim, the offender is liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding life imprisonment.

3. Aiding and Abetting: The Act prohibits aiding, abetting, or inciting the performance of FGM. Anyone who aids, abets or incites the performance of FGM is liable upon conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine not exceeding N100,000 or both.

It is noted that apart from the government and its agencies, various bodies like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), religious bodies and activists continue to work tirelessly to raise awareness, change cultural attitudes and enforce the law to protect women and girls from the harmful practice of FGM in Nigeria.

One therefore wonders whether Nigeria is indeed winning the fight against FGM. Are the leaders of tomorrow being carried along in this campaign? How are they being reached or can be reached? Which media platform needs to be deployed for the high rate of response in the campaign against FGM?

Social media plays an essential role in raising awareness, educating its audience, and influencing public opinion on multifarious social issues, including harmful traditional practices like FGM (Libretti et al. 2023a, 2023b). This paper focuses on Nigerian youths. They represent a significant demographic group that is often influenced by social media content and they in turn can influence societal attitudes and practices.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the influence of social media on the awareness, knowledge and attitude of Nigerian youths toward the legislative provisions against FGM
2. assess the legal consequences associated with the practice and promotion of FGM
3. recommend strategies that can be employed on social media to educate and mobilise youths against the practice

Statement of the problem

FGM which refers to the cutting of the external genitalia either totally or partially for non-medical reasons has been described as a harmful traditional practice that often leads to severe physical and emotional cum psychological consequences on their victims. Various measures have been taken at both federal and state levels to address the incidence of FGM. Aside from the Federal Government which passed the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act in 2015, states across the country have equally enacted laws on their own that criminalize FGM and provide penalties for offenders. Some of these states include Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti and Cross River.

Despite instituting laws and other measures against FGM in Nigeria, enforcement remains a herculean task as the practice remains widespread. This situation could be attributed to deep-rooted cultural practices, ignorance, and lack of awareness of the legislative provisions, especially among rural dwellers. Thus, efforts to combat the ugly incidence aside legal measures should incorporate educational campaigns, support for alternative rites of passage among the rural populace and community engagement through opinion leaders, women groups, and the traditional stool.

In the country, there are legal provisions that aim at prohibiting and eradicating FGM because of its harmful effects. Nonetheless, the practice of female genital mutilation is still prevalent in most states in spite of the existence of these legal provisions against its practice.

This paper therefore aims at assessing how well these legal provisions are known and understood by Nigerian youths and how social media platforms can be leveraged in the anti-FGM campaign.

Theoretical underpinning

Knowledge Gap Theory

Knowledge Gap Theory is a communication theory that explores the disparities in knowledge acquisition among different socio-economic groups. This theory explores how and why knowledge is distributed unequally within society and identifies the social and psychological factors contributing to these disparities. Developed in the 1970s, it posits that as new information enters a society, individuals with higher socio-economic status (SES) tend to acquire knowledge at a faster rate than those with lower SES, thus widening the gap between the two groups. This theory has significant implications for media, education, and public policy.

Knowledge Gap Theory was first introduced by Philip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien in 1970. Their paper, "Mass Media Flow and Differential Growth in Knowledge" published in the journal *Public Opinion Quarterly* laid the foundation for understanding how information disseminated through mass media could lead to unequal knowledge distribution across different social groups (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

The theory emerged from their observation that the dissemination of information through mass media did not uniformly reach all segments of the population. Instead, those with more education and higher socio-economic status (SES) were better positioned to absorb and understand new information. Tichenor et al. argued that several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including differences in communication skills, preexisting knowledge, social contacts, selective exposure, and the nature of mass media itself. Their work laid the foundation for subsequent research into the knowledge gap and its implications for societal inequality.

It is noted that as information is disseminated through mass media, individuals with higher SES tend to acquire this information more rapidly than those with lower SES. This is because higher income provides better access to information sources such as newspapers, books, and the Internet. Higher levels of education on the other hand enhance an individual's ability to comprehend and retain information. Both factors often lead to a widening knowledge gap in society. This theory has been applied in several fields of study including health communication where researchers have used the theory to study how health information is distributed and accessed. For instance, Viswanath and Finnegan (1996) examined the dissemination of cancer information and found significant knowledge gaps based on SES, impacting public health outcomes. In the field of political communication, Knowledge Gap Theory has been applied to understand differences in political knowledge and engagement. Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen (2006) investigated how media coverage of political issues differentially affects individuals based on their SES, influencing democratic participation. The theory also helps explain disparities in internet access and digital literacy. A study by van Dijk (2006) highlighted how socio-economic factors contribute to unequal access to digital technologies, perpetuating knowledge gaps in the digital age.

This theory is apt for this study because it is assumed that Nigeria youths can interface with social media as a result of their knowledge of the Internet coupled with their attainment of higher education in line with the tenets of the theory that individuals with a higher baseline of knowledge can more easily integrate new information, making learning more efficient. Their

status enables them to have more extensive and diverse social networks that provide additional channels for information flow.

Literature Review

Social Media Usage Trends in Nigeria

Social media refers to new media individuals use to explore and exploit social ties through information sharing. Thus, social media thrives on social relationships (Adikuru & Obiora, 2021; Uche & Obiora, 2016; Ojiakor et al., 2016). They categorised social media into five: social networking, social news, social bookmarking, social photos and videos, and wikis. They identified social media as including Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), YouTube, Myspace, LinkedIn and others.

In Nigeria, the rapid growth of social media usage has been largely attributed to increasing smartphone accessibility and affordable internet data. For example, Active mobile phone connections stood at 205.4 million which was an equivalent of 90.7 per cent of the entire Nigerian population as of early 2024. Statistics also indicate that internet users in Nigeria numbered 103 million, while internet penetration stood at over 45 per cent at the beginning of 2024. Out of this figure, Nigeria had over 36 million social media users which were 16 per cent of the entire population of the country (DataReportal, 2024).

In a related development, Obiora, Uche and Adikuru (2025) aver that Nigerian students are highly active on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook, using these tools primarily for social networking, education, and entertainment. These platforms are particularly popular among young people due to their convenience and ability to connect individuals across diverse geographical locations as well as Nigerian students not being aware or being indifferent about laws guiding online communication (Obiora & Onyeka, 2022; Onyeka & Obiora, 2021). The use of social media platforms by youth has become so glaring globally that it has transformed several sectors of human activities: advertising (Dunu et al., 2017), business (Obiora & Uche, 2023; Obiora & Kenechukwu, 2021), curtailing drug abuse (Adikuru & Okara, 2024; Obiora & Adikuru, 2024; Ezeaka et al., 2023), revolutionised public relations practice (Obiora, 2024), combat security challenges (Ezeaka & Ewetuobi, 2024; Uche & Obiora, 2023; Nwodu et al., 2021), platforms to advocate for social and behaviour change (Obiora, 2022), media for crisis communication (Nwodu et al., 2022), aids virality of news spread (Obiakor et al., 2025; Idi & Adikuru, 2023), bridging gaps between school leaders and the learning community (Obiora

&Uche, 2024). This trend has equally resulted in many of the youth becoming creators on diverse social media platforms rather than content consumers (Uche et al. 2021).

Effect of Social Media Usage on Nigerian Youths

Akintola (2021) conducted a study that focused on how social media affects teenagers' lifestyles and learning behaviours in Abuja with the title "Impact of Social Media on Teenagers: Nigerian Experience," found that while social media offers benefits like enhanced connectivity and access to information, it also poses challenges such as distractions and exposure to inappropriate content. The study recommended implementing corrective measures and educating teenagers to mitigate negative impacts.

Adaugo et al. (2015) explored the impact of social media on the lifestyle choices of Nigerian youths in Aba in the study "The Influence of the Social Media on the Nigerian Youths: Aba Residents Experience." The research found that exposure to social media influences various aspects of youths' lifestyles, including communication patterns and social interactions.

Olebara et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between social media usage and academic performance among Nigerian students in their study "Determining the Impacts of Social Media on Mood, Time Management and Academic Activities of Students and the Relationship with their Academic Performance." The findings indicated a statistically significant negative association between high levels of social media activity and participation in academic activities. Increased social media use was linked to poor time management and decreased academic performance. The study emphasized the need for awareness programs to educate students on balancing social media use with educational responsibilities.

Olayemi (2022) examined how Nigerian youths utilize social media for political engagement. In his study titled "Perceived Influence of Social Media Usage Among Youth: A Survey." The research highlighted that social media platforms serve as significant tools for political participation among youths, facilitating discussions and mobilization for political activities.

In a survey study titled Social Media Typology, Usage and Effects on Students of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, Uche and Obiora (2016) found that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular social media platforms used by Nigerian students. Inconsistent network signals, poor electricity supply and poverty were identified as limiting factors to social media usage while

the study recommended the inclusion of social media among general studies courses for tertiary students.

Female Genital Mutilation: An Overview

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons. In Nigeria, FGM is a deeply ingrained traditional practice inflicted on girls and women, recognized globally as a violation of human rights. Despite its harmful effects, it persists due to longstanding cultural beliefs and practices that have been passed down through generations. FGM is prevalent in more than 28 countries in Africa and in some communities worldwide, with significant concentrations in Nigeria, Egypt, Mali, Eritrea, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and northern Ghana. Somalia and Djibouti have the highest prevalence rates, where FGM is nearly universal. Nigeria, with its large population, has the highest absolute number of FGM cases globally, accounting for about one-quarter of the estimated 115–130 million circumcised women worldwide (WHO, 2020).

In Nigeria, FGM prevalence is highest in the South-South region (77% among adult women), followed by the South-East (68%) and South-West (65%), with lower prevalence in the North, where it tends to be more extreme. With a population of 150 million, 52% of whom are women, the national prevalence rate of FGM among adult women is 41%. There is a declining trend in younger age groups, and 37% of circumcised women do not support the continuation of FGM. Reasons cited against FGM include its harmful nature (61%), its contradiction to religious beliefs (22%), medical complications (22%), painful personal experiences (10%), and the view that it violates women's dignity (10%). However, significant support remains in areas where it is a deeply rooted tradition.

Origin and Significance: An Exposition of Female Genital Mutilation

The alarming statistics on FGM in Nigeria have garnered global attention, prompting international health organizations to collaborate with Nigeria to eradicate this harmful practice. Legislative and policy measures have been directed towards areas with high FGM prevalence to encourage behavioural change. Despite these efforts, FGM persists in some regions due to

the failure of campaigns to reach grassroots communities where the practice is prevalent. Additionally, FGM provides income for circumcisers, making its eradication a threat to their livelihood.

The WHO (2017) classifies FGM into four types:

1. **Type I (Clitoridectomy):** Removal of the prepuce or the clitoris.
2. **Type II (Excision):** Removal of the clitoris and partial or total removal of the labia minora.
3. **Type III (Infibulation):** Removal of the clitoris and labia minora, followed by stitching the vaginal opening, leaving a small opening for urine and menstrual flow.
4. **Type IV:** All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons, including pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and introducing harmful substances into the vagina.

Nigeria is notorious for FGM, with reports in 2001 indicating that the country had the highest number of FGM cases globally, accounting for about one-quarter of the estimated 115-130 million circumcised women (UNICEF, 2001). FGM is highly prevalent in Southern Nigeria, particularly in the South-East and South-West regions, with over 45% prevalence. Rural girls and women in these areas bear the brunt of the health, social, and economic consequences of FGM (Allen, 2014).

The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey revealed that FGM prevalence varies by region, ethnic group, and religion. About 32.3% of mutilated women live in urban areas, while 19.3% live in rural areas. Although urban areas have a higher number of mutilated women, these women are less likely to continue the practice on their daughters due to higher education levels and greater awareness of FGM's consequences.

FGM and the Rights of Girls and Women

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) stands as a widely recognized infringement on the human rights of girls and women, underscored by its global acknowledgement as a grave violation. This practice reflects entrenched gender disparities, representing an extreme manifestation of discrimination against women (United Nations, 2018). It encompasses a spectrum of human

rights transgressions, including violations of children's rights, infringement upon the right to health, security, and bodily integrity, contravention of the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and in cases where it leads to mortality, a violation of the right to life (World Health Organization, 2021).

Moreover, the vast majority of girls subjected to FGM undergo the procedure without their informed consent, depriving them of the autonomy to make decisions regarding their own bodies (United Nations, 2018). FGM often persists due to entrenched cultural beliefs and social pressures. It is justified within certain communities as a tribal tradition or a means of preserving chastity, family honour, hygiene, and aesthetic standards (World Health Organization, 2021). Additionally, it is erroneously believed to deter promiscuity, enhance marital prospects, and even improve sexual pleasure for the husband (United Nations, 2018).

In various regions, FGM is deeply entrenched in societal norms and identities, perpetuated as a customary practice to maintain social conformity (World Health Organization, 2021). For instance, in parts of Nigeria, cultural beliefs extend to using secretions from a snail's footpad during the procedure, with the misguided notion that it will influence the girl's sexual behaviour in the future (United Nations, 2018). Such practices underscore the complex interplay between tradition, culture, and human rights violations.

Anti-FGM Legislation: Global Overview

Libretti et al. (2023a) in their study, 'Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: an urgent call to action, noted that FGM/C eradication is only achievable if countries of the world wield a concerted effort towards attitudinal change. While also highlighting the dangers of FGM which traverses gynaecological, obstetric and psychological consequences, the authors recommended improvement in the knowledge of medical personnel and support for healthcare systems. It further called for policymakers to introduce stringent laws to deter the act of genital cutting and mutilation.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is globally recognized as a violation of human rights and hence, its condemnation by international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the World

Health Organization (WHO), and similar organizations. Several countries across the world have enacted legislation to fight and prohibit FGM.

Legislation against FGM appears in different 'forms and shapes.' This means that the laws vary in scope and severity, ranging from outright bans to measures aimed at prevention, education, and support for victims. Some Western countries including the United States and the United Kingdom have specific legislation that criminalizes FGM and protect girls and women. Specifically, in the United States, the "Federal Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 1996" makes it a federal offence to perform FGM on anyone under 18 years of age, with penalties including fines and imprisonment. In addition, several U.S. states have their own laws criminalizing FGM and providing for civil remedies.

In the United Kingdom, the "Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003" makes it illegal to perform FGM, aid, or abet its performance, or arrange for a child to be taken abroad for the purpose of FGM. The law was further strengthened in 2015 with the introduction of mandatory reporting requirements for healthcare professionals and teachers.

In the African continent, where the incidence is alleged to be most prevalent, some countries have enacted laws to address the practice of FGM. In 2008, Egypt enacted a law that banned FGM thus becoming the first country in Africa to outlaw FGM. While Nigeria's legislation against FGM came into effect in 2015 with the "Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015," which classifies FGM as a form of violence against women and girls; in Kenya, the practice was outlawed in 2011 via the "Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011." This law criminalizes FGM and imposes penalties for offenders, including fines and imprisonment. The law also provides for the establishment of anti-FGM committees at the national and county levels to coordinate efforts to eradicate the practice.

Methodology

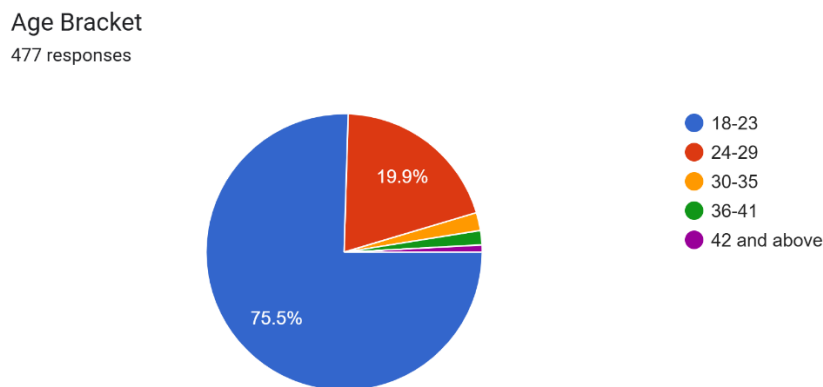
This study was designed as a descriptive survey. It adopted the quantitative research approach. A sample size of 500 Nigerian youths aged between 18 and 42 were targeted for the survey out of which 477 responded within the study period which was between 1st June to 28th June 2024. A structured questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms. The link to the survey was distributed through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook in

order to reach diverse youths across the various regions of Nigeria: North, West, East and South. Data generated were analysed in simple percentages and presented via pie charts.

Results:

Hereunder are the data from this study. It is presented in pie charts and analysed in simple percentages for ease of understanding.

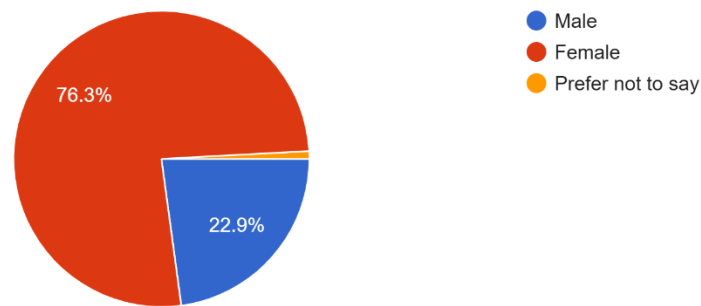
Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents based on Age



From Figure 1, 75.5% of the respondents fell within the age range of 18 to 23 while 19.9% of the respondents were within the age range of 24-29. Thus, the bulk of the respondents were young people.

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents based on Gender

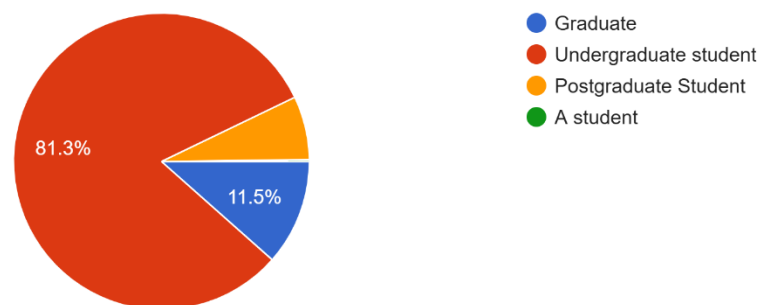
Gender
477 responses



On gender, 76.3% of the respondents are females. 22.9% are males while 8% preferred not to state their gender.

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents based on Level of Education

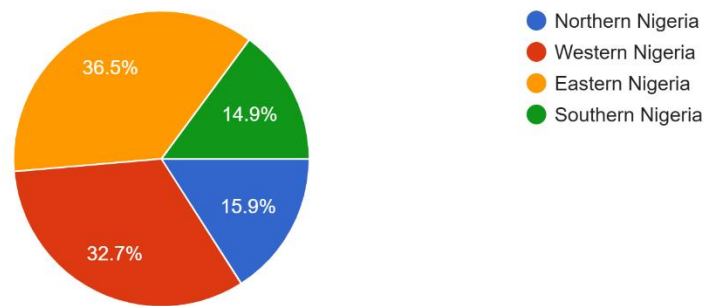
Educational Level
477 responses



On the level of education, the result shows that 81.3% of the respondents are undergraduate students. 11.5% are graduates while the remaining 7.2% are post-graduate students.

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents based on Region of Residence

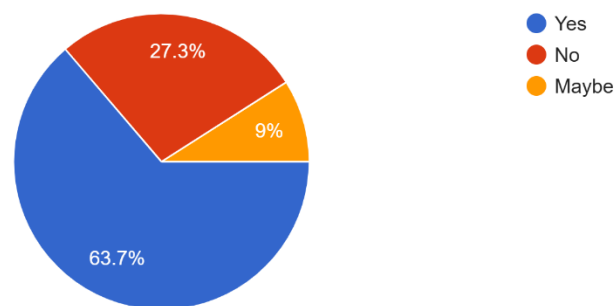
Region of Residence
477 responses



On the region of residence, results indicate that 36.5% of the respondents are from the East; 32.7% from the West. 15.9% from the North while 14.9% of the respondents are from the Southern part of Nigeria. Thus, the bulk of the respondents was from the eastern part of Nigeria.

Figure 5: Distribution of respondents based on Awareness of Anti-FGM Legislation

Are you aware that there are laws in Nigeria that prohibit Female Circumcision/Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)?
477 responses

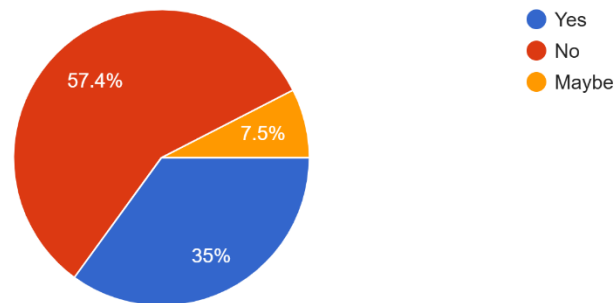


On the issue of awareness of Anti-FGM Laws in Nigeria, 63.7% claimed to be aware; 27.3% however indicated a lack of awareness while the remaining 9% could not state whether or not they are aware.

Figure 6: Distribution of respondents based on Knowledge of the legal implications of FGM

Do you know about any consequences and legal implications of practicing or promoting FGM in Nigeria?

477 responses

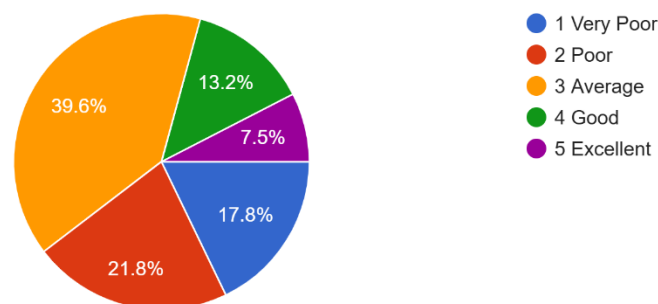


Data on the knowledge of the legal consequences of practising or promoting FGM in Nigeria showed that 57.4% of the total respondents indicated their lack of knowledge. 35% claimed to know the legal implications while 7.5% were undecided.

Figure 7: Distribution of respondents based on Level of Knowledge about the existence of Anti-FGM laws in Nigeria

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your knowledge of the existing laws that prohibit FGM in Nigeria?

477 responses



On the level of knowledge about the existence of Anti-FGM laws in Nigeria, data indicate the following responses: Very poor, 17.8%; Poor, 21.8%; Average, 39.6%; Good, 13.2% while 7.5% of the respondents rated themselves as excellent. This is a pointer that there is a serious

paucity of knowledge about the existence of laws that prohibit the practice of FGM in Nigeria among the youth.

Figure 8: Distribution of respondents based on Accessibility of information about FGM on social media

Have you ever come across any information about FGM on any social media platform?
477 responses

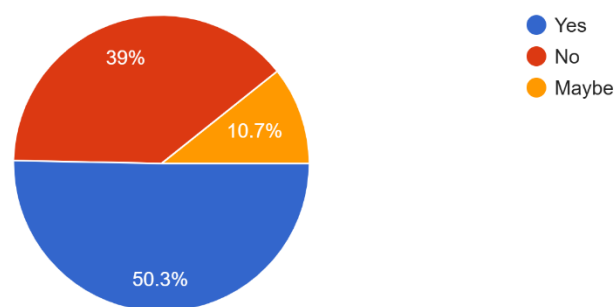
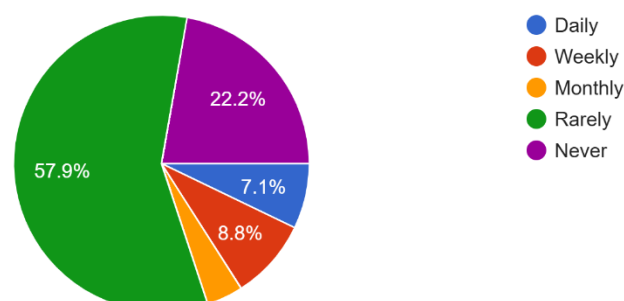


Figure 8, indicates that 50.3% had accessed information about FGM on social media platforms. 39% never accessed information about FGM on social media while 10.7 were not sure. Thus, the majority of the respondents had at one time or another accessed information about FGM via social media platforms.

Figure 9: Distribution of respondents based on Frequency of FGM issues on social media

How often do you come across information or discussions about FGM on social media?
477 responses

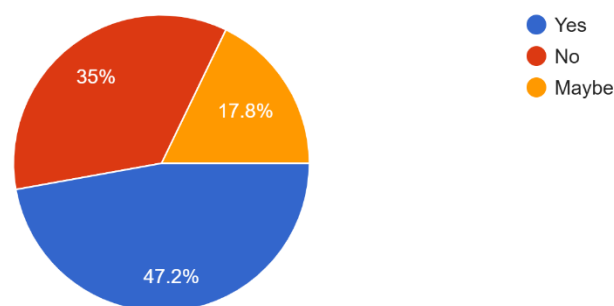


On how often respondents access information or discussion concerning FGM on social media, data indicate the following responses: Daily, 7.1%; Weekly, 8.8%; Monthly, 4%; Rarely, 57.9%; Never, 22.2%.

Figure 10: Distribution of respondents based on Influence of Social Media on Attitudinal Change towards FGM

Has exposure to information about FGM on social media changed your opinion or attitude towards the practice?

477 responses



Data on the influence of social media on the change of opinion or attitude towards FGM indicate that 47.2% of the total respondents agreed that their exposure to FGM information on social media brought attitudinal change. 35% of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 17.8% were not sure whether or not exposure to information about FGM on social media had any influence on their attitude or opinion towards its practice in Nigeria.

Figure 11: Distribution of respondents based on Most frequently accessed platform for FGM issues

Which social media platform do you most frequently use to access information about FGM?

477 responses

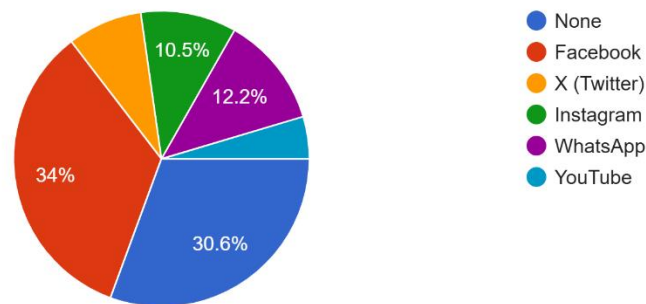


Figure 11 indicates that the most frequently used social media platform for accessing information about FGM by the respondents remains Facebook with 34%. However, 30.6% of the respondents indicated none. This means that they never accessed information about FGM on any social media platform. 12.2% and 10.5% of the respondents indicated WhatsApp and Instagram respectively. X (Twitter) and YouTube came last with 8% and 4.7% respectively as less patronized social media platforms for accessing information about FGM.

The only open-ended question: “Name any of the existing laws that prohibit FGM in Nigeria” had a paltry 187 (38%) answers. This means that 294 (62%) respondents did not even attempt the question. Out of the 187 respondents, only one individual could state the legislative provision without citing the law. Two respondents wrote the VAPP Act without the inclusion of the year of enactment. Others answered either ‘I don’t know’ or ‘No idea.’

Discussion:

Demographic Information indicates that bulk of the respondents are young Nigerians aged 18 to 23 (75.5%). This set of individuals are often described as Generation Z. This means that the bulk of these young Nigerians were born between 1997-2010. Some of their characteristics include computer literacy, internet savvy and social media enthusiasts. Being that these respondents could access the survey via the link to the Google form shows that they are internet

literate and are conversant with social media platforms. They are the digital natives as against digital immigrants (Dunu, et al. 2017; Ojiakor et al, 2016; Uche et al, 2017; Prensky, 2001).

There were more female respondents (76.3%) than male (22.9%). Perhaps the females were more enthused about the survey since FGM affects them particularly and in various ways than their male counterparts (Allen, 2014; United Nations, 2018; WHO, 2020). The bulk of the respondents are still undergraduates studying in various institutions across the country (81.3%). Most of them are residents in the Eastern and Western regions of the country (36.5%) and (32.7%), respectively.

On respondents' knowledge of anti-FGM legislative provisions, the awareness level is high with 63.7% claiming to be aware (Figure 5) but lacking knowledge of the legal consequences of practising or promoting FGM in Nigeria (57.4%; Figure 6). This could be the reason why 39.6% of the total respondents rated their level of knowledge about the existence of Anti-FGM laws in Nigeria as average followed closely by those (21.8%) who rated their level of knowledge as poor (Figure 7).

Looking at the data in Figures 8 and 9 respectively, it can be deduced that information about FGM can be accessed via social media; however, FGM issues are not frequently discussed on social media platforms. This is very unfortunate seeing that around 33 million young Nigerians interact on social media platforms (Statista, 2023). What that means is that content creators, social media influencers, social media mavens and other social media users are not keen on generating content about FGM let alone the legislative provisions aimed at curbing and eradicating the practice in Nigeria. This is a very pathetic scenario where about 41% of the female population still falls victim to the practice with its dire consequences on their health and wellbeing (United Nations, 2018).

It was found that social media can influence an individual's attitude and opinion towards FGM. Recalling Figure 10 data on the influence of social media on the change of opinion or attitude towards FGM, a large number of the respondents (47.2%) indicated that exposure to information about FGM on social media brought about attitudinal change in them.

The only open-ended question on knowledge of the Anti-FGM law, 183 out of 477 respondents attempted the question. This can only be attributed to their ignorance of such laws even though the majority (63.7%) claimed that they are aware of the existence of anti-FGM legislation in Nigeria. Thus, being aware is not the same as being knowledgeable or having an understanding of a phenomenon. It is therefore an eye opener that some of the legislations in the country are less known by Nigerians, especially youths both graduates and undergraduates alike. It therefore calls for a drastic measure in order to address and redress the situation. 'Ignorance,' it is said, 'is not an excuse before the law. Nonetheless, all arms of government: the legislature, the judiciary and the executive have a moral responsibility to ensure that the public especially young Nigerians are in the know of policies, laws and programmes of government so that they too can contribute their quota to build a strong, responsible and progressive and egalitarian society that will be the pride of all Nigerians both at home and in the Diaspora.

Summary and conclusion

The findings of this study show a poor awareness and understanding of the VAPP Act 2015 after ten years it was signed into law. Despite all the efforts by lawmakers, government and civil society organizations to raise awareness about its danger and harmful effects, the practice of FGM persists because of societal and cultural beliefs. Level of awareness and understanding of the law against FGM, and its enforcement remain a challenge.

A great number of youths in Nigeria have adopted social media as a platform for accessing and disseminating information apart from socializing and building community. Thus, social media can be said to have significant reach and influence among youths in Nigeria. These social media platforms can serve as tools for social and behavioural change by leveraging them to

disseminate and amplify anti-FGM messages, engage audiences and foster community dialogue. Thus, leveraging social media in the campaign seems to be the way to go especially to ensure a sustainable campaign since these teeming youths are the potential parents of tomorrow.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study which has shown that youths in the country have poor knowledge of anti-FGM legislative provisions, the following strategies are recommended to reverse the trend:

1. Infographics and visual content that explain what the Act is about and reasons to avoid FGM should be created and shared across all social media platforms, especially Facebook.
2. Survivors of FGM should share stories and testimonies about their journey in order to humanize the issue and make the anti-FGM campaign more relatable.
3. Social media Influencers, celebrities and public figures should be engaged and collaborate to support the campaign against FGM and to share their views and support on their social media platforms.
4. Unique and memorable hashtags such as #StopFGM, #EndFGM, #SayNoToFGM should be created and Nigerian youths encouraged to use them when sharing content related to the campaign.
5. X (Twitter) chats and discussions should be organized around the campaign hashtag to facilitate conversations, answer questions, and engage with the public.
6. There should be a collaboration with NGOs and activists working to end FGM in Nigeria to coordinate efforts and share resources and content.
7. There should be online webinars, workshops, and virtual events featuring experts, survivors, and activists to discuss FGM and its consequences.
8. Government agencies especially the Ministry of Gender/Women and Youth Affairs should encourage social media users to create and share their own content, such as photos, videos, and stories, to express their support for ending FGM.
9. FGM survivors' supporters and sympathizers and victims should be encouraged to share their personal stories and experiences with FGM on Instagram, Facebook etc. to inspire and encourage others to join the campaign.

10. Multisectoral and multichannel efforts should be employed to combat FGM by instituting educational campaigns and community engagements to complement existing legal provisions.
11. The Federal Ministry of Education should include FGM and other related issues as part of the basic education curriculum.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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