

4/10/2017

ARTICLE

Mobile App – A Secondary Solution to Gender Based Violence

Secondary preventive measure of GBV |

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In Anambra State and other parts of Nigeria, past interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the country were done by mainly tackling the primary causes of GBV such as cultural practices and norms that encourage GBV, poor awareness and enforcement of laws against GBV, and so on. These failed to generate the kind of results and impact that can be felt across the country. This is because most GBV projects never considered a secondary means of prevention and response that is immediate and will generate quick results. In most parts of Anambra State and Nigeria as a whole, there are still recorded cases of wife battery, sexual harassments, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, abuse of widows, rape, coerced/forced marriages and so on.

Just last year (2016), a story was published on The Sun news blog about a young woman named Roselyn, a French graduate who was brutalized by the husband throughout the period of eight years she lived with him. Roselyn suffered series of beatings (60 times) from the husband and lived in fear. At any time she disagrees with the husband, she earn a beating. Her husband beat her severally even during the time of pregnancy, and on one occasion threatened to kill her with a knife that was pointed at her neck. Roselyn got help from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) interested in abused women. The NGO assisted her and freed her from the evil husband. Since then, Roselyn has been living as a happy and free woman.

Another similar story happened in Nimo Njikoka LGA of Anambra, where a young girl of 15 years old was raped by a 52 year old man. The man who was believed to be a herbalist visited the girl's house when the parents were not around. After collecting the money kept for him by the girl's father, the herbalist bounced on the young girl, overpowered her and raped her. The matter was reported to the police and the herbalist was arrested.

These are the kind of stories of abuses one hear on daily basis across the country and are clear evidence that the prevalence of gender based violence is still very high.

In 2011, former U.S Vice President Joe Biden and Chief Technology officer Aneesh Chopra created "Circle of 6" mobile app, which they called "App Against Abuse". The idea was to inspire citizens to build a mobile tool to prevent sexual violence in campuses. Circle of 6 app has been used by 150,000 students and proven to be a very effective tool that can be used to quickly prevent and respond to gender based violence. Paired with extensive and holistic prevention education, Circle of 6 app has also been used in achieving behavioural changes. Statistics showed that 350,000 users across 36 countries used Circle of 6 mobile app.

Other GBV apps include Bsafe, Kitestring, Fight Back, 2six4, Safe Agent oo8, HarrasMap, NightOwl, mTrainer, mSoukhya, and mShakti. These apps were built with internet and GPS technology; available for Android and iPhone users. GBV mobile apps work very well with smartphones.

GBV apps have been used in countries like the United States, India, Egypt, Cambodia and Sri Lanka to fight against rape, sexual assault, domestic violence against women and eve teasing (men unwanted attention towards women). In India, nurses were trained on how to use a mobile device to identify women at risk of violence. Tools like mTrainer, mSoukhya, and mShakti have been used to increase knowledge and skills of health care providers in addressing domestic violence, provision of standard guidelines, protocols and job aids, and also used to provide education to women on the unacceptability of domestic violence and the services that are available for women.

GBV apps improve women' access to counseling and legal services, and increases their confidence to report cases of rape and sexual assault.

Nigeria with a population of 173.6 million people (National Bureau of Statistics 2013) is yet to tap from this great innovation to tackle gender based violence in the country. Statista, a statistics portal, estimated the number of smartphone users in Nigeria at 15.5 million in 2016 and projected that this figure will reach 18 million in 2017 and 23.3 million in 2019. Information from eMarketer profiling of countries that love smartphones showed that in 2015 alone there were 23.1 million smartphones in Nigeria; and this figure was projected to increase to 34 million in 2018. These figures are encouraging and hold great potentials for Nigeria to reduce the extent of GBV prevalence in the country. In Nigeria, young people use smartphones more than any other age group. This simply means that GBV occurrences among young people can easily be reduced by encouraging and supporting them to install and use GBV apps. With just one tap on a button, people like Roselyn who suffered series of domestic violence from her evil husband and the 15- year old young girl who was raped would have prevented such incidences or got immediate responses from close trusted friends. GBV mobile apps still remain the tools that can be used to quickly prevent or respond to domestic violence and other abuses.

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