

# A CRITICAL REVIEW OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND SEXTORTION AMONG GHANAIAAN WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

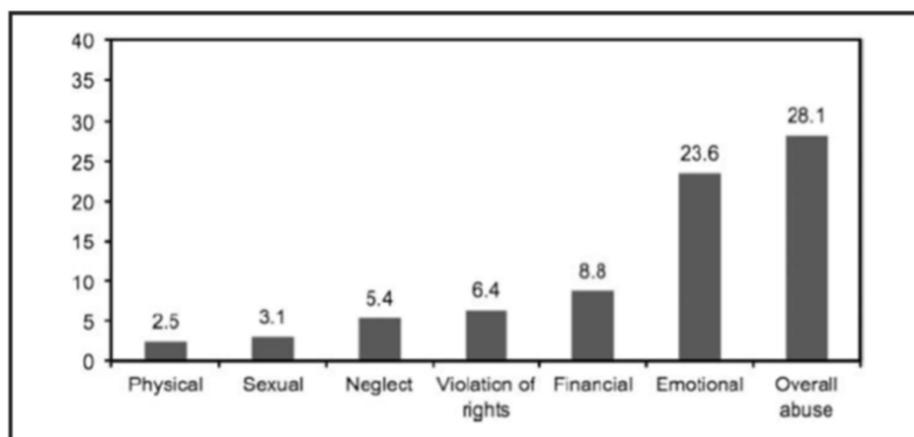
One of the greatest challenges in handling domestic abuse cases in Ghana is that abused women encounter opposition in reporting any form of abuse. This opposition is due to the inherent cultural norms which influence the support that any form of abuse in marriage is a private family affair that must be settled outside the criminal justice system. In spite of these challenges, most women continue to report incidents of domestic violence. This study provides a systematic review of abuse cases leading to sextortion and understanding of the main causes of Emotional Abuse and Sextortion among Ghanaian Women. Literature dated from January 1999 until January 2019 were identified by searching the appropriate keywords through international databases such as MEDLINE Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus, Cochrane and Google Scholar, Science direct. The interesting findings of this research shows that Social Media (via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram) is the cause of abuse that manipulate women's feelings and emotions by maltreating them in an emotional way and eventually affect their well-being. Evidence suggests that social media is among the most important factors that contribute to cyberbullying of vulnerable women in Ghana. Future researcher should look into smart factory company(s) that can use robots to detect sensitive images/videos on any device via smart phones. to help make the work of the law enforcement and police officers easy. Future researcher can also add on the research weight to look into forwarding nude pictures, videos and any form of sensitive images to be punishable under law.

**Keywords:** *Emotional abuse; sextortion; social media; Ghana; cyberbullying*

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of emotional abuse and sextortion has received considerable critical attention in recent times. It is a global social problem which hinders development or social progress of the globe especially African countries particularly Ghana. Traditionally, emotional abuse and sextortion can be found among family youth which puts women and the family in a state of risk. According to Humbach (2014) Sextortion can be defined as “sexually explicit photos and videos that are posted on social media or made available online without the consent of the victim, generally in retaliation for romantic disapproval” (P.12). Figure 1 shows a report of different types of abuse experienced by victims of sextortion (Donder et al., 2011). The sexual violence, intimidation social problem, and pain experienced by victimized women over the past decade remain unprecedented, global statistics show that 7 out of every 10 women has experienced emotional abuse in their lifetime (United Nations, 2017). In the developing world such as Africa, emotional abuse has been rooted in their traditional belief systems and this has become an acceptable practice among the people (Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019; Ryan,

2018; Wolak, Finkelhor, Walsh, & Treitman, 2018). In a related study, it is reported that Africa has the largest rate of violence against women (Abdul-Ghani, 2014; Cantalupo, Vollendorf, Pak, & Shin, 2006). Sextortion is a frequent widespread criminal activity that is not mostly reported either by the victims or the law enforcement does not act appropriately to help the victim, this eventually undermines the safety and emotional behaviour of most women and female youth of Ghana. Legal obstacles and cultural heritage are contributing factors that hinder the ability of the victims to report crime cases such as sextortion, these, therefore, increase the social cost of sextortion especially in countries such as Ghana (Amoakohene, 2004; Fwacs, 2017).

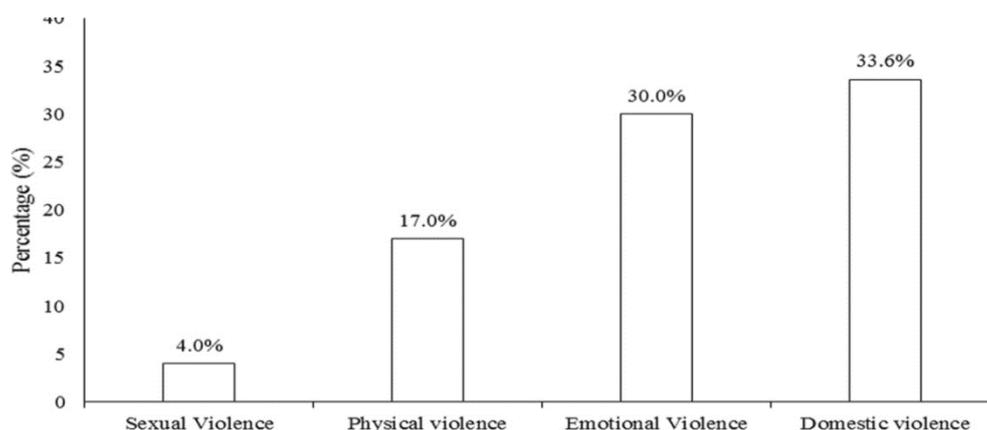


**Figure 1:** Different types of abuse experienced by victims of sextortion (Donder et al., 2011)

Factors found to be influencing emotional abuse has been explored in several studies, for example, the World Health Organization study shows that global intimate partner violence, sextortion and sexting via the internet is widespread in all the countries studied. According to this study, 13–61% have experienced physical violence by a partner, 6–59% reported sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives, and 20–75% reported experiencing sextortion and emotionally abusive act, or more, from a partner in their lifetime. Similar studies conducted in Africa indicates a very high incidence of intimate partner violence. A study in eastern Nigeria showed that 92% of the victims of intimate partner violence were women while only 8% were men. Domestic violence appears with different manifestations and forms, which include: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, spiritual abuse, economic abuse and emotional or psychological abuse.

Recently, a considerable literature has grown up around the theme of sextortion and emotional abuse against women (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence, & Price, 2014; Taherkhani, Negarandeh, Simbar, & Ahmadi, 2017). In the past decades, people use to fall victim to extortion, however in the light of recent wide spread of emotional abuse against women, the direction of victimization is shifting towards sextortion. The wrong portray of social media and emotional abuse via any form of platform on social media is very deadly and many victims have lost their lives because they did not speak out. Recent evidence (Wittes, Poplin, Jurecic, & Spear, 2016; Humbach, 2014) suggests that wrong usage of social media via WhatsApp, Instagram and facebook started with scamming people, blackmailing, cyberbullying, body shaming and now in recent times sextortion among partners has lead to a problem of emotional abuse. Previous research established by (Wittes et al., 2016) confirms that “sextortion is by far the most significantly growing threat to women” and that “sextortion cases tend to have more minor victims per offender than all other women sexual exploitation offenses.” Another important finding of (Wittes et al., 2016) was that “at least 28 percent of

these cases had at least one victim who committed or attempted suicide.” In addition, the report focuses mainly on the problem of sextortion as a species of child exploitation, ignoring the many adults victimized as well. Sextortion and emotional abuse or any form of abuse is a general problem that the government need to address as a serious offense that is punishable under the law. The perpetrators continue to engage in this barbaric act because they do not see it as a crime or maybe there is no forensic investigation or strong punishment attached to the offense by the law enforcement that says it is a serious offense that must be punishable under the law. A research conducted by Humbach (2014) defined Sextortion as sexually explicit photos and videos that are posted on social media or made available online without the consent of the victim, generally in retaliation for romantic disapproval. The negativity of sextortion or revenge porn has led to calls for the law making it a crime punishable by law enforcement. According to Humbach (2014) at least ten states in the US have enacted statutes to prohibit revenge-porn dissemination and also an important article offering “recommendations to lawmakers working to criminalize revenge porn” (p. 18) was recently published by Professors Danielle Keats Citron. Abusing married women, divorced women and the female youth by maltreating and threatening them in any way should be consider as a serious offense. A female partner should be able to walk out of any unhealthy relationship if not comfortable, and no male partner has the right to threaten a female partner about showing a nude videos or pictures to the public if a female partner decided to walk due to disrespect, maltreatment, extra marital affairs compering of body shapes. Emotional abuse and sextortion is what some abusive men use in this recent time to make a woman stay with them which is very wrong. The law enforcement needs to address this issue and eradicate it totally. The wrong portray of social media in a form sextortion and emotional abuse has turned so many women into other beings. Most women do not report the case and shy away from the eye of the public and others die in silence. Victims of emotional abuse women can turn to substance users; deal with low self-esteem, abusive parent because these women might end up transferring aggression on their child/children. Figure 2 shows Forms of domestic violence against women in Ghana with emotional abuse being one of the highest(Sedziafa, P., Tenkorang, Eric Y., Yuji, S., & Owusu, 2016).



**Figure 2:** Forms of domestic violence against women in Ghana (Sedziafa, P., Tenkorang, Eric Y., Yuji, S., & Owusu, 2016).

Statistical data from several studies suggest that one out of three women has been a victim of sextortion at the hands of their intimate partners (Bowman, 2003; Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016). Ghana cannot be ruled out of this situation, evidence shows that one out of every three has experienced emotional abuse from their intimate partner (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016). Research shows that yearly cases of violence and sextortion against women increase

sharply from 360 in 1999 to 3622 in 2002 (WAJU, 2003), there is, therefore, an urgent need to address this social problem.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This systematic review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement (Moher, 2009)

### **Advanced Systematic Search Process**

In this study, literature dated from January 1999 until January 2019 were identified by searching the appropriate keywords through international databases such as MEDLINE Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus, Cochrane and Google Scholar, Science direct, PsycINFO. The following appropriate keywords were carefully chosen for the systematic search “emotional abuse” AND “sextortion in Ghana” OR “intimate partners violence in Africa” AND “internet dating in Africa” OR “cyberbullying” AND “Law Enforcement” OR “extortion and/or blackmail” AND “women in intimate relationships” OR “electronic aggression” AND “homicide perpetrators” OR “cybercrime” AND “cyber aggression” OR “revenge porn” OR “intimate partner violence”. The internet home page source of different websites of public service institutions and federal agencies such as Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) of the Ghanaian police force, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) and Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) were undertaken in order to expand the scope of the research and to eventually acquire more materials for citations. In addition hard copies of potential manuscripts that fall under the scope of the study were collected from the Ghana public library. A comprehensive search of the Ghana library database using the above key words were also conducted. The main author of this review article contacted the corresponding authors of very important articles so as to secure other relevant information.

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

The eligibility for any article to be included in this study were based on the following criteria: (i) if the article is focused on Emotional Abuse (ii) report on Sextortion among Ghanaian Women (iii) intimate partner violence (IPV) (iv) report on sample of women suffering from emotional abuse via sextortion (v) the article is published in English (vi) literature dated from January 1999 until January 2019 (vii) the article must be published in a high impact peer-reviewed journal, book chapter and public institutions or organizational report (viii) the article must include at least one measurable regarding knowledge, attitudes, and/or behavior regarding victims of sextortion and perpetrators (ix) This review also focus primarily on sextortion leading to emotional violence, sexual violence, cyberbullying. It considered women’s violence against women (x) Articles were also accepted for inclusion if they reported original research using qualitative methods to emotional abuse leading to sextortion we, however, excluded qualitative methods

### **Selection of Studies**

In this study, the abstract of the various manuscripts were reviewed by taking into consideration, the inclusion criteria that is, articles related to emotional abuse and sextortion in Africa and women experiencing emotional and sexual violence in Ghana. The abstract were critically and

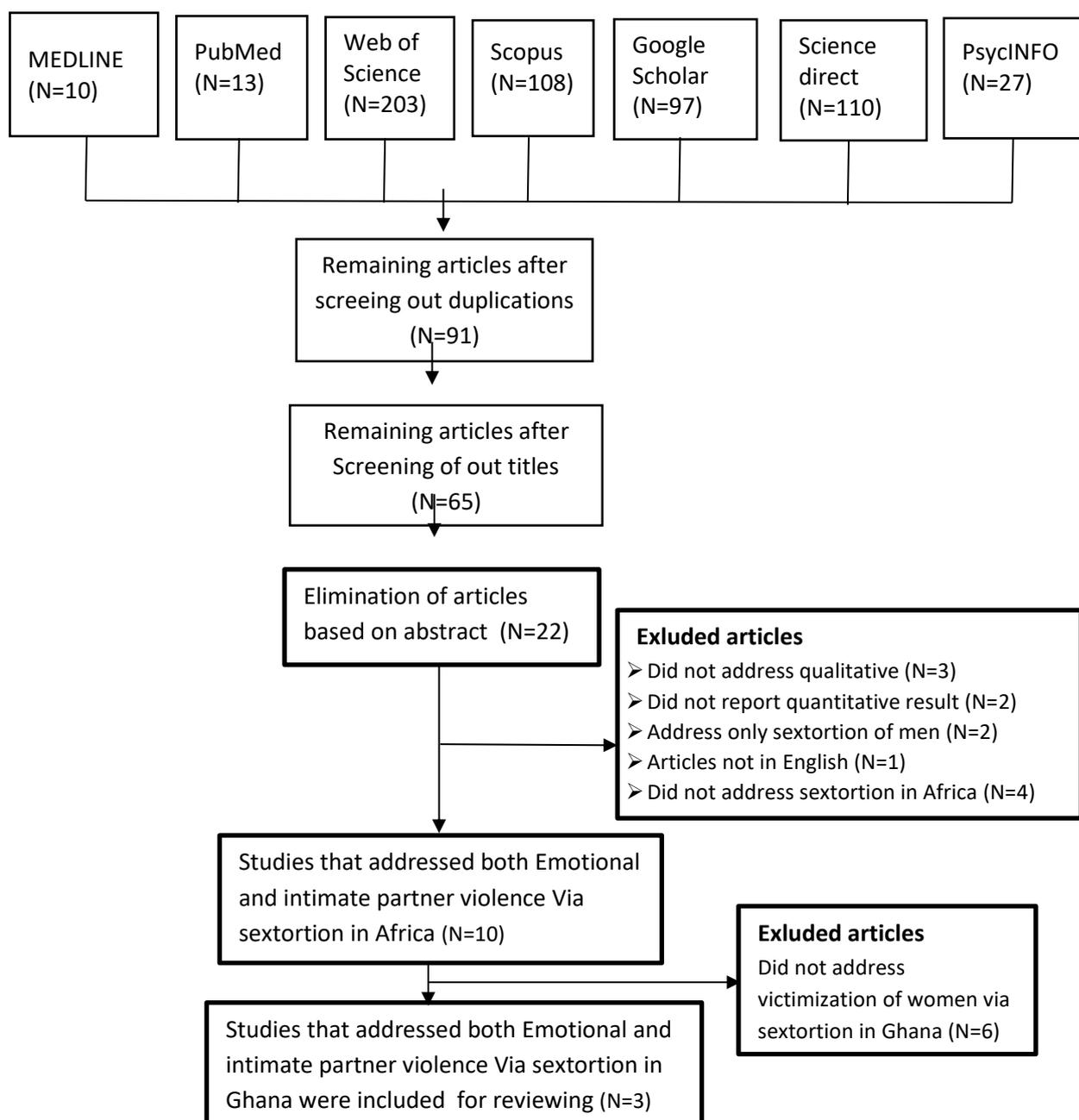
independently reviewed by the authors (BL, MBM and SM). Any inconsistency or difference of opinion as a result of the reviewing was resolved through discussion and a unanimous decision was arrived at after the meeting. The full version of selected articles were downloaded for further critical reviewing, however, the reviewing process was done in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Finally there was no difference in opinion among the reviewers regarding the appropriateness of an article that meets the inclusion criteria.

## Results and Discussion

The systematic flow sheet of the study starting from database search engines to inclusion is shown in Figure 3. After the authors have systematically reviewed the abstract, 91 articles were critically assessed to find out if they meet the criteria for inclusion. It was discovered that 81 out of the 91 articles did not meet any of the inclusion criteria developed. 10 articles dated between 2001 and 2016 met the outline inclusion criteria. However 6 out of the 10 articles were not related to sextortion of women in Ghana, so 4 articles were eventually included for the reviewing of this manuscript. The main reason for the elimination of large number of articles is that many of the articles did discuss intimate partner violence, sextortion, cyberbullying and emotional violence via internet sexting, but most of them did focus their research only on western countries, United state of America and some part of Asia. Only very few studies can be found in Africa, particularly Ghana. The four articles have been discussed as follows.

### *Health consequences of intimate partner violence among a group of patrilineal women in Ghana (Sedziafa, Tenkorang, & Owusu, 2016)*

In the study of Sedziafa et al. 2016, they adopted qualitative in-depth interviews to investigate the health consequence of intimate partner violence among patrilineal Ghanaian women. The respondents consist of 15 Ghanaian Christian women across to major tribes (Krobos and Ewe), aged between 25 and 65 years. The average age of the respondents is about 42.9 years. According to the authors, a large percentage of the respondents did not have any opportunity for formal education, only about 3% had secondary education although 1 of them had already enrolled in tertiary education at the time of the interview. About 95% of the respondents work in the informal sector such as agriculture, personal trading, and the rest are housewives. All the respondents had biological children whose ages range between 1 and 10. The vast majority of women were still married to their abusive husbands, whilst one was widowed and two were divorced. The duration of marriage to the index husband ranged between 2 and 35 years. In general, participants defined intimate partner violence as “deliberate unfairness, maltreatment or bullying directed towards an intimate partner, ranging from name-calling, false accusation (e.g., accusing partner of witchcraft), lying to or against partner, acquiring the partner’s personal possessions through coercion and stealing, beating, hitting, slapping, kicking, neglect or abandonment of family responsibilities, having extramarital affairs without current partner’s consent, stalking and forced sexual intercourse or rape” Most of the respondents of Intimate partner violence, particularly sexual violence where emotionally affected such as difficulty to sleep, withdrawal from social and family relationships. . Although the authors did not address the issue digital dating and sextortion, they did highlight on the barriers of seeking help for intimate partner violence. While all the participants new that they can seek help through the legal authorities, they were always not prepare to launch a complaint due to so many factors such as fear of abandonment, unfamiliarity with the police, long distance to the police station and the inability to afford transportation



**Figure 3:** Summary of the Steps Taken in Selecting and Including Appropriate Articles for the Review of this Study

*Women’s Autonomy and Intimate Partner Violence in Ghana (Tenkorang, 2017)*

Tenkorang et al collected data in 2017 from 2,289 women leaving among 40 communities in Ghana to investigate the associations between three types of autonomy namely, economic decision making, family planning decision making and sexual autonomy and women’s experiences with physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. Multilevel logistic regression was used to identify associations. The average, age of the respondents were about 38 years old; the majority of whom had less than a university education (88%), employed (71%), Christians (72%). Their average monthly income was 226 Ghana cedis (about US\$55).

Women who have had experienced in all four types of intimate partner violence are as follows: physical (40%), sexual (35%), emotional (58%) and economic (52%). Means scores were positive for all three individual-level measures of autonomy, but negative for two of the community level autonomy measures economic decision making and family planning decision making.

*Sexual and physical violence victimization among senior high school students in Ghana: Risk and protective factors (Ohene, Johnson, Atunah-Jay, Owusu, & Borowsky, 2015)*

The summary of this article shows that 358 (18.6%) young people reported ever being forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. A total of 737 (38.0%) youth reported being physically attacked one or more times during the past 12 months comprising 290 (14.1%) who had been attacked once, 232 (12.1%) attacked 2 or 3 times, 79 (4.2%) attacked 4 or 5 times, 47 (2.5%) and 89 (4.5%) attacked 8 or more times. This study examined risk and protective factors associated with sexual and physical violence victimization among Ghanaian senior high school students. A fifth of these students reported being forced to have sex in their lifetime while two out of five had been a victim of a physical attack in the year preceding the survey. In our final multivariate analyses, a number of factors were found to be significantly associated with sexual and physical violence victimization. For sexual violence victimization having friends who were not sexually active was protective while history of having had sex regardless of condom use at last sex, feeling sad or hopeless, being a victim of bullying, and being electronically bullied were identified as risk factors. Risk factors for physical violence victimization were attempting suicide, drinking alcohol in the past 30 days, and bullying others in the past month; a measure of parent respect for youth privacy just reached the level of significance as a protective factor. The overall magnitude of sexual violence victimization among our study population falls within the range of what has been reported in studies from other African countries (Bowman, 2003; Cools & Kotsadam, 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, & Amodu, 2019; Tenkorang & Owusu, 2018b, 2018a). The finding of 28% girls reporting sexual violence victimization in the present study using the 2012 Global School-based Health Survey (GSHS) was higher than the 17% reported for 15 to 19-year-old girls in the 2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) (Francis & King, 2008; Ohene et al., 2015; Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016) and the 18% found among female teenagers in two towns in Ghana. The difference may be due to measurement in different study populations: students in the present study, in and out of school adolescents in the 2008 GDHS, and adolescents from two towns in Ghana

## **LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

### *a. What trigger's emotional abuse and sextortion on social media?*

The intrusion and privacy of intimate partner relations is significantly being under threat because the current digital era has created opportunities for sexual engagement and violation of sexual privacy (Citron, 2019). A recent systematic literature review concluded that Sextortion is the act of extortion or blackmail initiated through an online platform in which perpetrators intimidate and threaten to post nude pictures and sex videos of their victims on internet if the victims fail to obey the perpetrators by providing them with more images (Citron, 2019; Korenis & Billick, 2014; Shapka, Onditi, Collie, & Lapidot-Lefler, 2018). Perpetrators adopt various techniques for exploiting their victims. In many instances, the perpetrators create virtual

intimate relations with the women and when trust is built in the women, they start requesting sexual materials from the victim after which sextortion starts. The perpetrators keep on requesting for more nude pictures of their victims, any attempt by the victims to reject their request, they start blackmailing the victim and issuing threats that they will publish the nude pictures of the victims online (Amoakohene, 2004; Bowman, 2003; Cantalupo et al., 2006). With the prevalence use of social media especially among local Ghanaian community, most Ghanaian women have fallen victims to so many online illegal activities such as sexting (i.e self production and dissemination of nude pictures via the internet), nonconsent Pornography (i.e perpetrators release nude pictures of their victims without their consent), cyber dating abuse, revenge pornography (i.e perpetrators maliciously distribute sexual or nude images of their victims), this could be referred to as sextortion. According to (Wolak et al., 2018), they expressed that sextortion involves a threat by the perpetrators to release sexual or nude images of their victims in order to force the victims to do something. It is now well established from a variety of studies, that federal agencies such Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) of the Ghanaian police force, United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) and Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) have labeled sextortion as an emerging online threat and violence against youth (Cantalupo et al., 2006, 2006; Dunne, 2007) that need urgent attention.

Some recent literature has been instrumental in our understanding of what causes Sextortion among Africans especially Ghanaian adults and youth (Cools & Kotsadam, 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika, Salami, & Amodu, 2019; Spruin, Baker, Papadaki, Franz, & Alleyne, 2017a), for example, it is reported by (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016) that sextortion among Ghanaian married women may be triggered when women question their husband's authority, don't listen, come home late, fail to show respect or cooperation when their comments are seen as nagging. Generally, this literature reported that African men use sextortion as a tool to manipulate their intimate partners and to maintain their male superiority or dominance. Online gaming is one of the largest growing entertainment systems in the world used by people of all ages. TPB can be used to explain why people spend so much time playing these games (Lee & Tsai, 2010).

#### *b. Digital dating leading to abuse of African women*

The problem of abuse of African women through digital dating is increasing at an alarming rate and it needs urgent attention. Over the last three decades much of the current literature on digital dating pays particular attention to its negative effect on the youth, especially women. Digital dating abuse is thought to be related to other new fields of research such as cyberbullying, cyberstalking and sexting, and is potentially associated with a devastating range of health outcomes including fear, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation. With the increased level of global digitalization, most African sexual or intimate partner perpetrators use online media as a source of sexual harassment and a means to threaten their victims by sharing with others. To date, several studies have begun to examine the use of cyber dating as a tool for emotional abuse and sextortion, for example in a recent study by (Amoakohene, 2004; Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Tenkorang, 2019) they discussed that cyber dating leading to sextortion in Ghana is now increasing at an alarming rate. The authors concluded that the perpetrators penetrate through the computer security of their victims by installing a virus such as malware program. In some cases the perpetrators lure the victim to install a program that eventually turns out to be a virus. The virus provides access to the victim's files such as videos, photos and in some cases, the perpetrator can gain access to the victim's webcam and thereafter start filming or recording the nude pictures of the victim. After these events, the perpetrator starts to intimidate, blackmail and extort the victim, in most

extreme cases the perpetrator threatens the victim to release her nude pictures. When the emotionally abused women are being perpetrated; it leads to a state of emotional distress, which is attributed to a sense of hopelessness. In recent research conducted by (Maluma, 2005), the author mentioned that women's emotional abuse leads to two basic assumptions by its victims, namely:

- ✓ A man has superior power over a woman, this has been the social norm supported by different institutions, that women belong to men like their personal property, and this makes women's self-perception to believe this to be true.
- ✓ Due to the above-mentioned fact, women in general have come to accept that men are dominant over them.

These basic assumptions, which arise from social point of view and the personal perceptions of the victim, originate from the ideology of hierarchical dominance, which makes women to become subordinate to men in general. Schwarzenegger a Comedienne from Ghana went through serious sextortion and emotional abuse and from her Ex-husband, Her ex-husband released the videos and nude pictures of Afia Schwarzenegger (Dollar, 2017). Most recently (Hollyscoop, 2017) reported similar case between Blac Chyna and Rob Kardashian, Rob Kardashian posted the nude video of blac Chyna on Instagram.

### *c. Survival of victims of sextortion in Ghana*

The issue of sextortion and emotional abuse among African community particularly Ghana has received considerable critical attention. According to (Baruchson-arbib, Internet, & Gan, 2004; Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016) problem of emotional abuse in African is comparatively recent, in the light of recent events in sextortion, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the emotional stress and pain survivors of emotional abuse experience (Abdul-Ghani, 2014; Bae, Stulz, & Tan, 2008; Harris, 2009; Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016). Sextortion by its nature can be described as instances where perpetrators threaten their victims to expose sexual images to persuade victims to provide them with their nude pictures or sexual activity. Sextortion related crime issues are very difficult to justify because of the high level of confidentiality between the perpetrator and the victim. Evidence suggests that the way in which survivors or victims of sextortion try to cope with their problem are complex and this may vary from one geographical location to another. Data from several studies suggest that sextortion and emotional abuse of women in Ghana are underreported, the situation is even worse in some part of African, according to (Cantalupo et al., 2006) they reported that 5% of Ghanaian women report cases of sextortion and emotional abuse. Previous research has established similar findings in which only 6 % of South Africa women report cases of sextortion to the police (Bowman, 2003). The main reason for the underreported cases is that, the Ghanaian legislation and law enforcement agencies such as the police are apparently not fully prepared and equipped to deal with this new internet crime effectively (Bowman, 2003; Cantalupo et al., 2006; Spruin, Baker, Papadaki, Franz, & Alleyne, 2017; Tenkorang & Owusu, 2018a). Apart from seeking help from the law enforcement agents, some victims of sextortion and emotional abuse try to suppress the bad experience in order to protect their dignity and respect. Factors found to be influencing coping behaviour of emotionally abused women through sextortion have been explored in several studies (Cantalupo et al., 2006; Djikanović et al., 2012; Fwacs, 2017; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Recently (Perrott, Morris, Martin, & Romans, 1998) investigated the coping behaviour of emotionally abused women, they examined a sample of 40 respondents and 19 respondents described how they have intentionally managed to forget about the emotional depression of being victims of sextortion, majority of

them try to suppress the bad experience in order to protect their mental or physical status. Some classical examples of statements indexed to this category of respondents are: “I put it way back in my mind, pretend it didn’t happen some days;” “. . . blocked it out, didn’t want to deal with it;” “you know you hope that it goes away . . . you don’t really want to know about this thing;” (Perrott et al., 1998). In some instances, victims of sextortion acknowledging the emotional trauma of sextortion and they try to confront the emotional difficulties it presented (Spruin et al., 2017). According to (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016) support seeking is one of the ways some victims of sextortion try to cope with emotional stress. In the developed countries such as USA, Europe and some part of Asia, supporting agencies are readily available to help victims of sextortion through counseling, the situation is however different in Africa especially Ghana. In a related study by (Cantalupo et al., 2006) they reported that 27 respondents had to cope largely on their own and others fail to disclose their trauma due to some reasons such as, fear of affecting their status or in some cases it is too difficult to deal with, “It’s quite a tricky thing to talk about you know I’m not telling all my sisters or my . . . anybody so there’s no repercussions for (abuser) or anything.” “Another woman, also protecting the perpetrator (father): “It’s really strange, he was really good to me and I’ve never ever let my mother know even now. He’s dead now and I’ve never ever let my brothers and sisters know because really he was good...I would never ever want any member of the family to know, because it would destroy what they think about him.”

#### *d. Consequences of Sexting Behaviors among Emerging Africans*

In the light of recent advancement of digital communication technologies, a new form of sexual harassment and intimate partner violence known as sexting is being practiced by perpetrators across African countries. Sexting has received critical attention among researchers due to its negative implication and socio-economic cost and emotional characteristics. According to Gámez, “sexting is the creation and exchange of text messages, photos, or videos with sexual or erotic content via the Internet or smartphones” (Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019), this phenomenon is known as sexting. A considerable amount of literature has been published on sexting, with many studies revealing that sexting is a prevalence situation among African communities (Bowman, 2003; Cools & Kotsadam, 2015; Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019; Tenkorang & Owusu, 2018a). Recent work by (Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019) has established that the prevalence rates of sexting reached 27% among adolescents, sexting was found to increase during adolescence, with a prevalence rate of 3% at 12 years old to 36% at 17 years old (Bowman, 2003; Cantalupo et al., 2006; Cools & Kotsadam, 2015; Felder et al., 2017; Michael, 2016; Moss et al., 1997; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2019; Stonard et al., 2014; Tenkorang & Owusu, 2018a). Recent evidence suggests that the main causes of engaging in sexting include sexual exploration, social pressure, and sending sexual content as a means to increase one's self-esteem, however, empirical evidence from literature suggests that sexting could be a risk factor for online victimization (Bowman, 2003; Geometry & Analysis, n.d.; Mezzavilla, Ferreira, Curioni, Lindsay, & Hasselmann, 2018). In Africa, the consequences and costs of sexting, cyberbullying and intimate partner violence may have serious repercussions on the individual victims, family, community and national level. Some of the cost associated with this internet violence are, healthcare (emotional and physiological stress), costs to the survivor of the intimate partner violence and her family, employment and financial difficulties. Children who are victims of sextortion or sexting are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems, perform poorly in school and be at risk of perpetrating or experiencing domestic violence in later life (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Some of the significant findings to emerge from this study is that sextortion and sexting through social media has an undesirable consequence such as emotional stress and depression among the women of Africa, particularly Ghana. It was also observed from the literature that individual sexual privacy can easily be violated through online social networks. Online digital Sexting, sextortion and cyberbullying require special attention and protection under the law and online platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc need to protect the privacy of their users by blocking online sexual images. One of the greatest challenges in handling sextortion and cyberbullying cases in Ghana is that abused women encounter opposition in reporting any form of abuse. This opposition is due to the inherent cultural norms which influence the support that any form of abuse in marriage or family relationship is a private family affair that must be settled outside the criminal justice system.

The Ghanaian Constitution of criminal justice of law needs to aid law enforcement to protect abused victim's rights because every individual has freedom of human rights. The steps should be taken in protecting abused individuals:

- (i) Ghana should be part of the global campaign against sextortion and emotional abuse by passing domestic abuse bill. The bill empowers the law enforcement agencies' mandate to punish perpetrators of sexual violence of any form and it also provides opportunity for the police and other law enforcement agencies to undergo special training related to handling of sexual violence.
- (ii) Screening mechanisms must be made available to appropriate train officers to inspect and investigate any form of sexual violence or sextortion
- (iii) Ghana should reinforce the chance of quick action to be taken on any form of abuse by giving the resources to the Department of Social Welfare, NGOs and state medial facilities and expanding training programs and education campaigns.

Future researchers should also look into forwarding nude pictures, videos and any form of sensitive images to be punishable under law. Lastly, the future researcher should look into case of people who take pictures or videos of others without their concert as serious crime/offense that is punishable under the law.

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