

Scoping Review of Social Media Representations and Responses to Sexual Violence during the Covid-19 Lockdown Periods in Sub-Saharan Africa

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background/Introduction

The lockdown was a common containment strategy used across the world including the sub-Saharan African countries in response to the covid-19 outbreak. Social media therefore became a major tool for socialisation (Cinelli, *et al.*, 2020; Gao, *et al.*, 2020) and an avenue for the expression of repressed emotions due to the limitation on movement (Cauberghe, *et al.*, 2021).

The lockdown increased economic and mental stress with pressure on families and social relationships (Posel, Oyenubi, & Kollamparambil; 2021) which translated into different vices such as rape within marriage/dating, rape by strangers, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children and sexual abuse of mentally and physically disabled people (WHO, 2002). The spate of sexual violence generated virtual reactions and representations reflecting inherent inequalities that require further interrogation in order to ameliorate the everyday consequences of complex emergencies and vulnerabilities.

Social media provides critical spaces for different social actors to construct and interpret their realities as embedded in their relationships, networks and structures. This scoping review aims at interrogating the captured precariousness in sexual relationships, the narratives around the disruptions, emergence of gender and power dynamics, review reactions and interpretations, as well as pathways to help within these periods. Evidence from this review can inform measures and approaches to addressing vulnerabilities in precarious spaces and in complex emergency periods.

Research questions

This review will be guided by questions that will facilitate evidence mapping and synthesis on the representations and responses of sexual violence within the period of Covid-19 lockdown as evidently presented by social media. Crucial to the focus of this study are questions such as:

1. What were the representations of sexual violence reportage, symbols, meanings, actions and strategies taken during the lockdown measures that were introduced in SSA?

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2. What forms and contexts of sexual violence emerged dominant, the marginal ones, the reflections they emit, inequalities they portray, reactions, interpretations and pathways available and accessed within these periods on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube)?
3. What lessons were learnt and what do we need to know in addressing vulnerability in precarious spaces and in complex emergency periods?

Methods

A scoping review will be conducted with a focus on social media representations and responses to sexual violence during the Covid-19 Lockdown periods in SSA. This review will be conducted using the 6-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley, 2005 (to identify research questions and relevant studies, select studies, chart data, report results and consultation) and will conform to Joanna Briggs Institute Reviewers' Manual (2020) Methodology for JBI. Published articles will be sourced from Google Scholar, WHO Covid-19 Library, Web of Science, Academic search Complete (EBSCO), Sociological abstract, ProQuest, Elsevier, Plos One, MEDLINE, Social Science Database, and Africa-Wide via EBSCOHOST. Unpublished articles and write ups will be sourced from four major social media platforms - Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Instagram. Hashtags will be used to source for posts related to sexual violence in sub-Saharan Africa from March 2020. Some of the hashtags that will be used to generate data from the selected social media platforms are: #METoo, #SexualViolence, #SexualAbuse, #GBV, #SexualAwareness, #SexualAssault, #StandtoEndRape, #trauma, #endsexualviolence, #equality, #endsexualassault, #Consent #rapeculture #feminism #humantrafficking, #domesticviolenceawareness, #violenceagainstwomen, #stoprapeculture, #nomore, #emotionalabuse, #domesticabuse, #stoprape, #covid, #Lockdown, #sexualassaultsurvivor, and #assault. Only posts and articles published in English Language will be included in the review. The relevant content will be extracted from published articles and posts about violence occasioned by the peculiarities of the Covid-19 pandemic. The posts will be classified and analyzed by types of sexual violence, frequency of violence, number of engagements, and types of engagements.

The study will be independently screened for eligibility by two researchers during different rounds of the review. The descriptive analytical and thematic method will be used to summarize the data according to published methods.

Inclusion criteria

Reports, news and images that emerged during the lockdown periods in SSA to depict sexual violence will be included. The dominant and marginal social media platforms, published and unpublished research, working papers and media websites that hosted or shared stories, news, reflections and positions on sexual violence during the Covid-19 lockdown in SSA will be included in the review. The periods in consideration will be limited to when lockdown was active in countries within the sub-Saharan Africa region.

Exclusion Criteria

Sexual violence cases that were reported or shared on social media platforms in African countries that are outside the sub-Saharan region will be excluded. Similarly, sexual violence reports or

shared information or experiences that occurred outside the lockdown periods in the sub-Saharan African countries will be excluded.

Participants

Participants will be any person who has experienced violence during the Covid-19 lockdown in Sub-Saharan Africa; child or children, teen or teenagers, youth or adolescents, Male or men or guys, Female or Women or ladies, Old person or elderly.

Expected findings

The result will identify a narrative and diagrammatic description of violence in sub-Saharan Africa as identified and selected from many sources of evidence. Representations and responses of sexual violence during the Covid-19 lockdown will be mapped out in diagrammatic and descriptive form aligning with the scope of the review.

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