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Protecting Under Age School Children from Explicit Music: A Policy Push for Nigeria

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Executive Summary

Adult secular music in Nigeria, particularly genres such as pop, hip-hop, and afrobeats, frequently contains explicit lyrics promoting sex, violence, substance abuse, and profanity. These contents have become highly accessible to children via radio, digital streaming platforms, social media, and even school events. A recent observation at a primary school Christmas celebration revealed young pupils dancing and singing along to inappropriate adult-oriented songs, underscoring a widespread failure by schools and event organizers to protect children from such exposure.

Extensive research links repeated exposure to degrading sexual lyrics with earlier sexual initiation, increased risky sexual behaviours, poor body image, especially among girl child, depression, and anxiety. Violent and substance-glorifying lyrics are associated with heightened aggression, antisocial tendencies, substance use, and normalization of harmful behaviours during critical developmental years. In Nigeria's cultural and religious context, which prioritizes modesty, respect, and moral upbringing, this exposure undermines parental and societal efforts to instill positive values in children.

To safeguard Nigerian children, especially in primary and secondary schools, the brief recommends urgent legislative and regulatory measures:

- The National Assembly may wish to amend Section 2(1) of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act 1992 to ban adult secular music on radio, TV, and public events during family hours (6 AM–10 PM), and may also wish to establish a National Music Classification Board under the NBC – modelled after the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) for films – to classify all secular music releases (physical, digital, or streamed) using categories such as G (General), PG (Parental Guidance), and 18+ (Adults Only).
- The National Assembly may wish to advise the Minister of Education to prohibit unrated or adult-rated music with vulgar language in primary and secondary schools during celebrations.
- The National Assembly may wish to amend the NBC Act to create a National Music Classification Board under the NBC (similar to NFVCB for films) to rate all secular music releases physical, digital, or streamed, using categories such as G (general), PG (parental guidance), and 18+ (adults only).
- The National Assembly may also wish to fast-track passage of the Child Online Access Protection Bill (HB 244, 2023) to require content moderation, age verification, and penalties for online platforms that expose minors to harmful music lyrics or videos.



Introduction

Adult secular music, often characterized by explicit lyrics involving themes of sex, violence, substance abuse, and profanity, has become increasingly accessible to children through digital platforms, radio, and social media. In Nigeria, where music is a central part of cultural expression, the distinction between secular (non-religious, mainstream pop, hip-hop, afrobeats) and gospel music is prominent, but the former frequently includes content unsuitable for minors.

Recently, during a recent attendance at a primary school Christmas celebration in Nigeria, I was deeply shocked and dismayed to witness the type of secular music being played. The event, meant to foster joy, community, and perhaps some reflection on the season's values, instead featured songs with explicit, adult-oriented lyrics – content involving themes of sexuality, immorality, and objectification that no child should be exposed to, let alone encouraged to sing along with or dance to. Young pupils, innocent and impressionable, were dancing and even attempting to recite lines that are entirely inappropriate for their age. This personal experience highlights, a troubling trend where schools and event organizers, in pursuit of entertainment, inadvertently or negligently expose children to harmful secular music.

Research indicates that exposure to such music can shape children's emotional and behavioural development¹. For instance, studies show that degrading sexual lyrics are linked to earlier initiation of sexual activities among adolescents², after controlling for other factors like demographics and prior behaviour. Additionally, violent lyrics have been associated with increased aggression, antisocial tendencies, and desensitization to violence³. For vulnerable children, this can contribute to long-term issues like substance abuse or unhealthy socialization. In the Nigerian context, where cultural and religious values emphasize modesty, respect, and moral upbringing, such music erodes these foundations and conflicts with parental efforts to shield children.

Against this back drop, this brief argues for legislative action to protect children from adult secular music, highlighting the need for stricter regulations and enforcement mechanisms to safeguard Nigeria's youth.

Issues:

The primary issues stem from unregulated exposure to adult secular music, leading to psychological and behavioural harms, especially in educational and festive settings like school celebrations. Key concerns includes:

a) *Psychological Impacts:*

Repetitive listening to intense or melancholic music can form negative emotions, particularly in vulnerable children and adolescents, by reinforcing patterns of rumination – where individuals dwell excessively on distressing thoughts or feelings⁴. This process may deepen existing emotional lows, leading to heightened symptoms of depression and anxiety. On the other hand, exposure to degrading and sexualized lyrics further compounds these issues by

¹Teuta Alimi Selmani, "The influence of music on the development of a child", in *Journal of Effective Teaching Methods (JETM)*, Vol. 2, Issue I, 2024, 109 – 200.

²Brian Primack et al, "Exposure to Sexual Lyrics and Sexual Experience Among Urban Adolescents", in *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, 2009, 317 – 323.

³ Craig Anderson et al, "Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 84, No. 5, 2003, 960–971

⁴ Roger Botello, "The harmful side of music: Understanding the effects of rumination on adolescent mental health". <https://www.manningchildrens.org/news-blog/2023/april/the-harmful-side-of-music-understanding-the-effe/>. Accessed 30th January, 2026.



promoting internalized objectification, where individuals – particularly girls – begin to view themselves primarily through a sexualized lens, leading to poor body image and broader mental health challenges. Such lyrics or videos often objectify bodies and emphasize sexual worth, contributing to body dissatisfaction, increased anxiety about appearance, and disorders like depression or eating issues. Overall, these impacts underscore the need for protective measures, as unchecked exposure during formative years can distort self-perception and emotional regulation, with long-term implications for mental well-being.

b) *Behaviour Risks:*

Explicit lyrics in music correlate with advances in risky activities among youth, including earlier sexual encounters, substance abuse, and aggression. Research findings, shows that adolescents exposed to degrading sexual lyrics in popular music are more than twice as likely to initiate sexual intercourse early and to progress to more advanced levels of noncoital sexual activity⁵. Similarly, research has it that violent themes in lyrics increase hostile thoughts, aggressive feelings, and antisocial tendencies, as demonstrated in experiments where listening to violent songs heightened aggression-related cognition and emotions. The fact is that the frequent exposure to music that glorifies or references substance use – common in genres like rap and certain hip-hop styles – is associated with increased alcohol consumption, illicit drug use, and aggressive behaviours in youth⁶. This repeated exposure can normalize defiance, violence, and drug culture during critical developmental years, potentially reinforcing and encouraging these risky patterns.

Cross-Country Experience

Internationally, countries have implemented regulations to curb children’s exposure to explicit media, including music, offering models for Nigeria.

- In the United States of America, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibits obscene content on broadcast media at all times and indecent/profane material (including explicit lyrics) during child-accessible hours (6 a.m.–10 p.m.) and also in elementary schools. For instance, if an investigation is warranted and the FCC finds a station/school in violation of its rules, it has the authority to revoke a station/school license, impose a fine or issue an admonishment or warning⁷.
- China’s Law on the Protection of Minors (2020 revision) explicitly prohibits exposing children in schools or elsewhere to music, digital publications, or online content that could impair their physical or psychological health, including explicit sexual or violent themes⁸. Article 50 of the said law prohibit contents that is harmful to the physical or psychological health of minors such as advocating obscenity, pornography, violence, cults, superstitions, gambling, inducements to suicide, terrorism, separatism, or extremism.

⁵ Steven Martino et al, “Exposure to degrading versus non degrading music lyrics and sexual behavior among youth”. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16882784/>. Accessed 30th January, 2026.

⁶Meng-Jim Chen et al, “Music, Substance Use, and Aggression”, in *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. 67, 373 – 381.

⁷“Obscene, Indecent and Profane Broadcasts”. <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/obscene-indecent-and-profane-broadcasts>. Accessed 2nd February, 2026.

⁸See Law of the People Republic of China on the *Protection of Minors* (2020 Edition). <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/protection-of-minors-2020/>. Accessed 2nd February, 2026.



- The Gambia Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) issued a nationwide directive banning musicians and entertainers whose song contain vulgar, indecent, immoral, or explicit content from performing at any school in the country⁹. This is a direct policy prohibiting such adult music performances in schools to protect students from negative influences.

Lessons for Nigeria

- ✓ Establish clear time-based or contextual restrictions on broadcast media, backed by strong enforcement mechanisms.
- ✓ Enact or strengthen explicit legal prohibitions in child protection laws targeting harmful content in educational and public settings.
- ✓ Implement direct bans on performers with explicit content in school environments for targeted protection.

Legislative Intervention

To address the exposure of children to adult secular music in Nigeria, which often contains explicit lyrics, themes of violence, substance abuse, and sexual content, the following legislative interventions are proposed.

- The National Assembly may wish to amend Section 2(1) of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act 1992 to ban adult secular music on radio, TV, and public events during family hours (6 AM–10 PM), and may also wish to establish a National Music Classification Board under the NBC – modelled after the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) for films – to classify all secular music releases (physical, digital, or streamed) using categories such as G (General), PG (Parental Guidance), and 18+ (Adults Only).
- The National Assembly may wish to advise the Federal Ministry of education to ban playback of unrated or adult-rated music with vulgar language in primary and secondary schools.
- The National Assembly may wish to expedite action on pending Bill on the Child Online Access Protection Bill (HB 244, 2023) to, mandate content moderation, age verification, and penalties for platforms exposing minors to harmful music lyrics or videos.

Conclusion

The unchecked exposure of Nigerian children to explicit adult secular music in schools and at public events, represents a serious threat to their emotional, behavioural, and moral development. Evidence from psychological and behavioural research, combined with real-world examples from school settings, demonstrates that such content contributes to early sexual activity, aggression, substance abuse risks, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and erosion of culturally cherished values of modesty and respect.

⁹Adama Makasuba, “Education Ministry bans Musicians with Vulgar Songs from performing at Schools”, December 4th, 2025. <https://gambiana.com/education-ministry-bans-musicians-with-vulgar-songs-from-performing-at-schools/>. Accessed 2nd February, 2026.



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