



Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria: A Qualitative Review of Policy Responses and Social Work Intervention

DESTINY EZE AGWANWO, MARTIN CHIGOZI IGWE
University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract. Gender-based violence (GBV) is among the most significant human rights violations and a significant issue of public health in the world, as women and girls are the disproportionate victims. The persistence of GBV in Nigeria is indicative of entrenched socio-cultural beliefs, structural disparities and institutional frailty that, to date, subject women to the spectrum of abusive behaviours. This paper provides a qualitative review of policy responses and social-work interventions that address GBV in Nigeria. The analysis was based on secondary sources like policy documents and empirical research. It dwelled on four main domains, which include: (i) the forms, patterns and prevalence of GBV in Nigeria; (ii) socio-cultural and structural factors that perpetuate GBV; (iii) legal and policy frameworks that have been developed to address GBV; and (iv) social-work interventions that can be used to alleviate the impact of GBV. As shown in the review, GBV is manifested in various ways, such as physical violence, rape, female genital mutilation, economic deprivation, child marriage and emotional abuse, and it is affected by patriarchal norms, poverty, poor enforcement of law, and gender inequality. Despite the enactment of notable legislative and policy mechanisms in Nigeria, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, the Child Rights Act, and the National Gender Policy, implementation is still uneven due to limited resources, institutional lapses, and socio-cultural opposition. The paper also emphasizes the importance of social workers that fulfill the policy-to-survivor support gap by means of psychosocial counselling, trauma-informed care, community education, policy advocacy, and multi-agency collaboration. The paper concludes that survivor centred services, conversion of harmful socio-cultural norms by means of community participation, better enforcement of the law and institutional coordination, and economic empowerment of the women and girls in the social protection programmes are the key to preventing GBV

and improving the welfare and security of women and girls in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender-Based violence, qualitative review, policy responses, social work, intervention

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) represents a major human rights violation and a widespread problem that threatens the health of millions of women and girls throughout the globe. According to international development and health organizations, approximately 736 million women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once during their lifetime, with an intimate partner being the main offender (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021; UN Women, 2023). GBV is a global issue because it persists irrespective of geographic boundaries and cultural differences; it manifests in forms like domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking, forced marriage and harmful cultural traditions like female genital mutilation and child marriage (Okafor, 2024; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2023). Gender based violence in developing countries experiences worsened conditions because of three factors, which include economic deprivation, inadequate legal systems, and cultural patterns that enable male dominance to continue (Agwanwo & Badey, 2022; Adewale & Adeyemo, 2024). In Nigeria, one-third of women have experienced one form of violence, and one-fifth have experienced physical violence. The COVID-19 pandemic brought GBV to the fore as cases surged. The National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] and United Nations Children Fund [UNICEF] (2022) reported that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases throughout 23 states increased by 149% during the first two weeks of the April 2020 lockdown. The most common types of GBV include physical and verbal abuse, economic abuse, discriminatory inheritance rights, female

genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C), child marriage, cyber-stalking, and many more.

The ongoing existence of gender-based violence or violence against women shows that society upholds a patriarchal system, which permits men to dominate while it silences victims and excludes women from decision-making processes that occur in family, community and governmental matters (Ezechi, Musa, David & Idigbe, 2023; Okafor, 2024). The structural factors, which include economic instability, unemployment and ineffective implementation of existing laws like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015, increase the risk of violence against women and children (Ogunyemi & Salawu, 2022; Ikpeze, 2024). Nigeria has established various policy frameworks and legislative instruments to combat the rising incidence of GBV through protective measures and the prosecution of offenders.

The VAPP Act serves as the most essential legislation, which most states have adopted, because it establishes criminal penalties for all forms of GBV while providing survivors with access to shelters and legal services (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2023). The National Gender Policy (NGP) and National Strategic Framework on GBV are also policies that aim to create gender equity and lead the coordination of multi-sectoral action in the health, justice and social sectors (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). However, these progressive policies are not fully enforced due to limited financial allocations, insufficient training of law enforcement personnel, and the lack of balance in the application of laws to the federal units in Nigeria (Agbo et al., 2024; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025).

Even when the legal protection is made available, it is often compromised by corruption and procedural barriers, which prevent the survivors from seeking justice (Amadi & Nwankwo, 2023; Chukwu et al., 2024). Hence, the interventions have been more about reactive response instead of proactive; symptomatic relief, instead of targeting the underlying causes, e.g., gender norms, economic disempowerment, and educational disparities (Bello, 2024; Oladipo & Yusuf, 2023). Intervention in social-work has a vital role in sealing the gap between policy intent and actuality of GBV survivors through the provision of holistic, survivor-focused care and systemic change. Social workers play a major role in psychosocial counselling, case management, community education and empowerment programs that will assist survivors to negotiate legal systems, receive healthcare, and reestablish independent economic functionality (Adetoro & Musa, 2023; Udo & Etim, 2025).

Also, community-based programs, such as safe areas where women can be, peer-support networks and contact with traditional leaders, have proved effective in changing some negative norms and creating a sense of accountability at the local level (Nwosu, 2024; Okeke & Olatunji, 2025). Notably, social workers are also involved in policy development, as they record patterns of GBV, assess service delivery and advocate approaches that rely on centralizing the agency of the survivors (Akinyemi et al., 2024; World Bank, 2025). Nevertheless, the practice of social work in Nigeria is fraught with challenges ranging from the lack of resources, lack of sufficient training of professionals to handle GBV, and lack of a well-established social welfare system (Onyema & Eze, 2023; Salim Adams, 2024). Hence, to break the structural barriers and help survivors to attain sustainable well-being, there is a major need to enhance the GBV-related responses, establish properly funded models that best integrate policy goals, community involvement and professional practice.

2. Conceptualising Gender-Based Violence

GBV affects the physical and emotional health of women; It is a systemic issue that permeates and affects diverse sectors of any society, with implications for growth and development, and so cannot be ignored. The World Bank reports that gender-based violence constitutes a worldwide pandemic which impacts one-third of all women throughout their lives, and the failure to address this matter will create high future expenses (World Bank, 2019). Women represent the largest group of GBV victims throughout the world; for this reason, people use the term violence against women to describe this situation. The United Nations defines gender-based violence or violence against women as every gender-based violent act which causes or probably will cause women to endure physical or sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats and coercive actions and unlawful confinement which occur in both public and private settings. This definition encompasses three types of violence, which take place within domestic settings and public areas. The definition of violence includes battering and the sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, traditional practices which harm women and all forms of non-spousal violence, sexual harassment, trafficking of women and forced prostitution (United Nations' 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women).

This definition creates a theoretical framework which enables the study to find its appropriate base. Thus, the combination of multiple elements, which include cultural practices, political systems, protracted conflict and religious beliefs, makes Africa a continent where women and girls face special risks of gender-based violence. Describing the prevalence of GBV in South Africa, the South African President is quoted to have said his country is “the most unsafe place in the world to be a woman” (BBC Africa, 2019).

Between the ages of 25-29, the percentage of Nigerian women who have faced physical violence since they turned 15 years stands at 28% for women. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) observes that the incidence of GBV continues to grow in some parts of Nigeria, particularly in the North, as a result of the insurgency and terrorist activities in the North-East (UNFPA, 2019). They observe that GBV manifests in the form of forced early marriages as well as physical, mental and sexual assaults against women and girls (UNFPA, 2019).

2.1 Forms, Patterns and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria manifests itself through multiple connected pathways that demonstrate the presence of deep-seated patriarchal beliefs and gender discrimination throughout families and communities and institutional settings. The

majority of GBV cases that get reported in Nigeria involve physical violence, sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, economic deprivation, together with traditional practices that include female genital mutilation (FGM) and child or forced marriage.

Physical violence usually involves beating, slapping, choking or any other body harm that is caused to the victim by the intimate partners or family members, whereas sexual violence includes rape, marital rape, sexual coercion and sexual harassment. Emotional violence manifests itself in terms of threats, humiliation, intimidation and controlling behaviours to degrade the psychological well-being of women and economic violence to deny women access to financial resources, employment opportunities or property rights (Fawole, 2018; Adegoke, 2017). Violent cultural practices are still major aspects of GBV in Nigeria. Despite the advocacy to end female genital mutilation, millions of women and girls persistently face the practice. The national statistics reveal that FGM is practised on about 19% of women between 15 and 49 years old in Nigeria, and early marriages are not uncommon in different parts of the country (National Population Commission [NPC] & ICF, 2019; National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). All these manifestations highlight the fact that GBV in Nigeria is a wide spectrum of behaviours that violate the rights of girls and women, and not only physical aggression.

Table 1: Forms and Manifestations of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria

Emotional Violence	Verbal Violence	Financial Violence	Physical Violence	Sexual Violence
Neglecting one's spouse in public Disregarding one's spouse in public or in the sight of others. Sustaining Malice Evaluation of each act	Using harmful words Mono-syllabic answers in dialogue Shouting Commanding Speaking rudely before a group of youngsters	Not permitting her to be productive Deciding what kind of work she ought to do Denying cash aid for maintenance Forcing her to give her spouse complete authority over her finances	Physical acts such as beating, slapping, smacking, kicking, punching, and pulling Threatening to beat, etc. Malnutrition or restriction on food	Denying sexual relations, sexual distancing Rape Forced sexual relations when the partner is not ready Insisting on Sexual practices the partner is not comfortable with

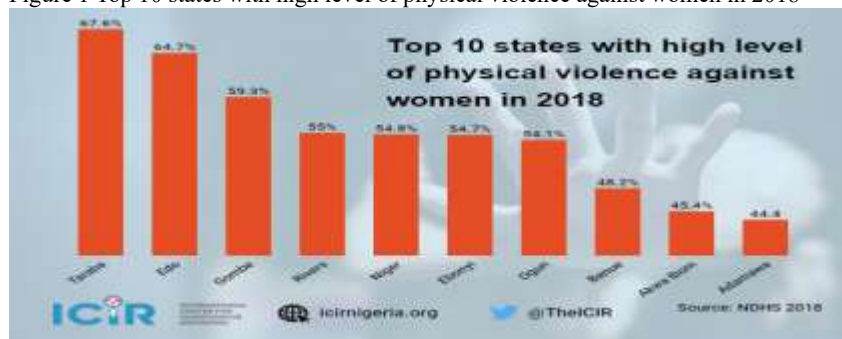
Source: Williams and Nyong (2019)

In Nigeria, GBV has clear demographic, cultural and regional differentiation as the trend of the phenomenon reflects the variations in the social norms, economic statuses and educational attainment within the nation. Intimate partner violence is the most common type of GBV in Nigeria, and most of the offenders are those who are married. The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey indicates that approximately 31% of Nigerian women have been physically abused in the past 15 years, and that in most of the cases, the violence took place in intimate relationships (NPC & ICF, 2019). This pattern of violence is also affected by socio-economic factors. Women who are less educated or not educated, women living in rural areas and economically reliant on their husbands are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse (Fawole, 2018; Adegoke, 2017).

The regional trends are also evident. The prevalence of early marriage and some of the sexual exploitation is higher in Northern Nigeria, whereas the prevalence of FGM and domestic violence is higher in some southern states in

relation to the deep-rooted patriarchal customs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In the North-Eastern part of Nigeria where conflict and the Boko Haram insurgency has led to the massive displacement of women and girls, the risk of sexual violence, forced marriage, and exploitation is high as seen in figure 1 (NDHS, 2018). These trends show that a set of socio-cultural norms, economic inequalities, and structural vulnerabilities is involved in the shaping of GBV in Nigeria.

Figure 1 Top 10 states with high level of physical violence against women in 2018



Source: NDHS (2018)

Nevertheless, GBV is endemic in Nigeria with a very high prevalence rate, thus making it one of the most serious social and public-health problems of the country. According to the reports of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, thousands of cases of sexual and gender-based violence are registered every year in several states across the country, but the real number is much more significant because of the under-reporting (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2020). Many victims do not report cases of abuse due to the cultural norms that put a value on the privacy of their families, fear of social stigma and lack of trust in law-enforcement agencies (Fawole, 2018). In 2025, different incidents across the country indicated how GBV has endangered the lives and safety of women. In Ekiti State, a woman known as Modupe Alasin was killed due to severe beatings from her husband on the claim that she had taken too much time to go to the farm; this is indicative of the fatal nature of physical abuse that takes place in supposedly rural locations (Akari, 2025). Akari (2025) reported the rape and murder of a young woman in her home in Oyigbo Local Government Area in Rivers State, wherein a suspect was arrested by the police; this reveals how sexual violence may become a deadly menace and how women can be at the receiving end even in a place they know well. In addition to the individual incidents, the national advocacy voices have expressed concern over the overall trend of GBV, with Egbejule (2025) demanding a state of emergency following documentation of a drastic increase in the number of women killed due to GBV across Nigeria. All these events indicate the necessity to enhance legal, social, and policy measures to ensure the safety of women and girls across the country.

2.2 Socio-Cultural and Structural Drivers of Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Socio-cultural norms refer to expectations, values, customs and standards of behaviour that are common to a specified society and determine how people conduct themselves and interact. In Émile Durkheim's classic work, norms are presented as representations of the collective that emerge from shared beliefs and moral values to control individual behaviour and maintain social order (Durkheim, 1895/1982). Similarly, Talcott Parsons developed the concept of socio-cultural norms as fundamental elements of the social system that guide individuals toward fulfilling anticipated social roles within institutions such as the family, religion, and the economy (Parsons, 1951). In this respect, the socio-cultural norms are not simply a set of traditions but a system of anticipation that generates attitudes to gender roles, power, and personal relations. These norms define the proper roles of men and women in many Nigerian cultures and set expectations about who is in control, who obeys, and who makes decisions in households and societies.

In close relation to socio-cultural norms is the idea of patriarchal belief system, which is a social organization where males are the central figures; of political leadership, moral guidance, social privilege and property ownership and females are mostly excluded from holding power. Feminist sociologist Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as a system of social organization and practice whereby men control, suppress, and exploit women; she underlined its functioning in many institutions such as family, labour market, the state, and cultural systems (Walby, 1990).

The socio-cultural norms and patriarchal belief systems are one of the greatest contributors to gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. Similar to most traditional societies, Nigerian society is historically organized based on patriarchal values that put men in the positions of authority in their homes and society, with women in the lower ranks of society. Such gender hierarchies tend to justify male dominance over females, which leads to the establishment of where violence towards women becomes naturalized or socially acceptable (Joseph-Obi. & Agwanwo; Fawole, 2018; Adegoke, 2017). The cultural norms that prioritize obedience in women, their toleration of an abusive marriage and maintenance of family honour often discourage women from reporting any abuse or abandoning a violent relationship. According to the ICF (2019), a considerable percentage of women think that a husband has a right to beat his wife in some situations, as well as to abscond from household responsibilities; this reflects an internalization of patriarchal norms. Unhealthy traditional customs are also known to strengthen gender inequality and subject women and girls to violence.

In some communities in Nigeria, child marriage and female genital mutilation practices are still practised against the law. According to UNICEF, around 43% of girls in Nigeria are married off before their 18th birthday, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria, where poverty and cultural demands promote the practice of child marriage (UNICEF, 2023). On the same note, female genital mutilation has been affecting millions of Nigerian women and girls, mostly in the Southern part of Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Community leaders tend to defend such socio-cultural practices as a way of maintaining the tradition or even regulating female sexuality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, captured the world awareness of the problem and pointed out that violence against women is a product of historically unequal power relations between men and women (United Nations, 1995), which could be said to still be practised in Nigeria. In addition to culture, structural and institutional conditions also perpetuate gender-based violence in Nigeria. Poverty, unemployment and economic inequality make women extremely vulnerable to abuse; for this reason, their financial autonomy and ability to leave abusive homes are curtailed. In most Nigerian families, women are economically reliant on male partners, which is something that regularly forces them to stay in abusive relationships because they are afraid of losing their financial providers (Fawole, 2018). A lack of effective legal enforcement systems also contributes to the issue. Despite the legislation

passed in Nigeria, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, its enforcement has been uneven across the states. In most cases, a victim of violence faces bureaucratic hurdles, corruption, or insensitivity of the law enforcement agencies when seeking justice (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Conflict, insecurity, and displacement create a major structural pathway which leads to gender-based violence against women in Nigeria by spreading violence throughout communities which face insurgency and communal fighting. Women and girls in North-Eastern Nigeria which suffers from Boko Haram insurgency have experienced abduction as well as forced marriage and exploitation. Usman (2021) documented some instances of sexual exploitation of displaced women in the Borno State camps, where the humanitarian aid and protection systems were lacking to ensure the safety of women living in these camps. These descriptions highlight the role of insecurity and institutional fragility in appropriating gender-based violence. In turn, the socio-cultural norms, economic inequalities, poor legal structures, and vulnerability to conflicts are all considered as interdependent mechanisms of gender-based violence in Nigeria. Therefore, an all-encompassing policy response as well as social intervention is necessary to tackle the underlying factors of the target problem.

2.3 Policy and Legal Frameworks Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Nigeria has formulated several legislative and policy frameworks to deal with gender-based violence (GBV); this is in line with the international commitment to protect the rights and dignity of women and girls. The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015 is one of the most important legal tools that is seen as a great legislative attempt to criminalize multiple acts of violence against people, especially women and vulnerable populations. The VAPP Act broadens the legal definition of violence to cover harmful traditional practices, sexual harassment, battery of a spouse, abandonment of dependents, and economic abuse (Olatunbosun, 2015). Notably, the Act acknowledges such offences as marital rape, eviction, and other harmful practices that wives were subjected to and were poorly managed before the criminal justice system in Nigeria was strengthened (Eze-Ababa, 2017; Akinlabi, 2020).

Another provision of the law is the protection orders, compensation to victims, and support services to victims of violence. Nonetheless, researchers have noted that due to its progressive contents, the application of the VAPP Act in Nigeria is still uneven,

as the country has a federal system where the states are required to domesticate the Act first, and then it will be enforced in the states (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Fawole, 2018). Thus, several states have lagged in the adoption of the legislation which restricts their role in offering national protection against gender-based violence. However, the Act remains one of the most comprehensive laws regulating GBV in Nigeria and is a significant measure to reinforce the country's human rights protection systems.

The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003 serves as the next important law that fights against gender-based violence in Nigeria. The Act was enacted to internalize the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Act establishes child protection laws which safeguard children from all forms of abuse and exploitation together with dangerous cultural practices that specifically harm girls through early marriage and sexual exploitation and trafficking and child labour (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2003). The Child Rights Act has established eighteen years as the legal marriage age while it banned all activities which cause children to experience physical or sexual or psychological harm. It also stipulates the roles that government institutions, parents, and communities have in ensuring the welfare of children and providing them with access to education, health care, and protection against violence (Okeke & Okoye, 2019; Adegoke, 2017).

Although the Child Rights Act has some progressive provisions, implementation still faces challenges, just as with the VAPP Act. Due to sociocultural and religious concerns about child marriage and family norms, several states, particularly in northern Nigeria, initially opposed full domestication since Nigeria's federal structure requires implementation at the state level. Nevertheless, this Act has been a significant legal tool in combating gender-based violence against girls since it sets legal standards that protect the rights of children, as well as punishing the culprits who abuse the rights of children.

There are also policy frameworks that have been developed in Nigeria to enhance gender equality and to curb the underlying causes of gender-based violence. The National Gender Policy (NGP), implemented in 2006 and amended in 2021, is one of the most critical policy initiatives in this context, as it provides a clear roadmap for incorporating gender equality into national development planning and governance frameworks. The National Gender Policy aims to eradicate gender discrimination, ensure women's empowerment, and enhance institutional

frameworks for preventing violence against women and girls (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021). The policy focuses on gender mainstreaming strategies in government institutions, awareness campaigns against harmful cultural practices, improved access to justice for victims, and the introduction of support services for victims, including shelters, counselling, and legal assistance (Fawole, 2018; Akinyemi, 2020). Additionally, it aligns Nigeria's national commitments with international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, which seeks to guarantee gender equality and prevent violence against women (United Nations Women, 2022).

Although the National Gender Policy offers a much-needed strategic guideline for addressing GBV, its implementation is highly reliant on political will, adequate funding, and alignment among government institutions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021; Akinyemi, 2020). Therefore, institutional and sustained commitment, as well as enforcement, are necessary to translate the frameworks into real protection for women and girls.

2.4 Social Work Intervention Strategies in Addressing Gender-Based Violence

The primary social-work method which protects survivors from gender-based violence uses psychosocial counselling and trauma-informed support services. Social workers use their professional counselling skills to help women and children who experienced gender-based violence to recover from the psychological, emotional and social effects of the abuse. The psychological effects of gender-based violence create severe trauma which includes anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and withdrawal symptoms; this requires victims to receive dedicated psychosocial treatment (Fawole, 2018; Adegoke, 2017). Social workers therefore provide confidential counselling, crisis intervention, and safety planning, along with referral services, to support victims in rebuilding their confidence and reintegrating into society. In Nigeria, the Mirabel Centre in Lagos is one of the organizations that provides a broad range of services, including medical care, psychosocial counselling, and legal assistance to victims of sexual violence (Akinlabi, 2020). Similarly, the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Teams (DSVRT) in Lagos State is an organization that unites social workers, counsellors, and lawyers to help victims access justice (Oluwafunke, 2021). In this light, social workers can help victims eliminate the trauma, enhance their coping skills, and recover their

social functioning, thus dealing with the psychological effects of gender-based violence in the long term.

The next consequential social-work intervention plan is the community awareness, advocacy, and social mobilization that will change the detrimental social norms that propagate gender-based violence. Because GBV is greatly rooted in patriarchal cultures, social workers regularly participate in the community education programmes aimed at questioning the beliefs that justify violence against women and girls. Such programmes usually include awareness-raising, community discussions, sensitization programmes in schools, and cooperation with traditional and religious leaders to foster gender equality and respect for women's rights (Fawole, 2018). Social workers often collaborate with civil societies and community development organizations to carry out workshops, media campaigns, and community enlightenment programmes which bring out the negative effects of domestic violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.

For instance, community-related advocacy efforts funded by organizations like Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF) have focused on addressing communities about the prevention of sexual violence and motivating victims to access professional support services (Akinyemi, 2020). Equally, sensitization by social welfare institutions that are carried out in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs has helped to prevent more cases of GBV and has also enlightened the public on the legal remedies available to victims (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In these preventive measures, social workers strive to change the socio-cultural context that allows gender-based violence and encourage attitudes that respect the rights and dignity of women.

The third crucial social-work intervention approach is the policy advocacy, legal advocacy, and multi-agency response that amplifies institutional response to gender-based violence. Social workers usually become the champions of the survivors and help them to move through the legal system, get protection orders, and achieve justice in formal institutions. The lack of knowledge on their rights or fear of retaliation are the obstacles that survivors of gender-related violence must overcome in most cases, which makes the role of social workers very significant (Adegoke, 2017; Akinlabi, 2020). The social workers also liaise with law-enforcement bodies, health professionals, non-governmental organizations and state institutions to have a unified response to cases of GBV. Nigeria has multidisciplinary response mechanisms that often

entail collaboration between social-welfare departments, police units, health facilities and civil-society organizations to deliver concerted efforts to survivors. A good example of this cooperative method is the creation of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC) in various states of Nigeria, such that survivors obtain medical care, counselling, and legal aid in a well-coordinated network of specialists (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2020). Besides direct service delivery, social workers also advocate better enforcement of legislation like the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act and the Child Rights Act through policy discussions, research and public advocacy activities to strengthen the institutional efforts toward gender-based violence. All these efforts by social workers play a major role in preventing GBV as well as protecting the survivors in Nigeria.

3. Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

This paper illustrates four main implications of the social work practice and policy.

The first implication, which is the most obvious, is the strengthening of survivor-centred and trauma-informed service delivery systems. The analysis of the prevalence and forms of gender-based violence in Nigeria demonstrates that survivors are often left deeply psychologically traumatized, socially stigmatized, and economically vulnerable and in need of professional and coordinated support services. This implies that social workers ought to expand the trauma-informed counselling services, crisis intervention, and rehabilitation services, which aim to mitigate the psychological and socio-economic aftermath of abuse. The practitioners should, therefore, incorporate psychosocial therapy, shelter, medical referrals and legal assistance into an all-inclusive support system that prioritizes the dignity, confidentiality, and empowerment of the survivors. On a policy level, the governments and social welfare organizations should invest in specialized centres of gender-specific violence response, put more trained social workers in hospitals and police departments, and ensure that the facilities like Sexual Assault Response Centres and Domestic Violence Response Teams are adequately funded and made available to the victims in both rural and urban areas.

The second significant implication relates to the change of the negative socio-cultural norms by using the community-based social work intervention and public education policy. The study of patriarchal ideologies, early marriages and gender stereotypes demonstrates that gender-based violence is deeply

rooted in the cultural attitudes that legitimize male superiority and female inferiority. Therefore, social workers should go further than managing single cases to implement more extensive community-based interventions that test harmful gender ideals and endorse equality. This involves community discussions, enlisting religious and traditional leaders, arranging school-based education programmes, and grassroots advocacy movements that protect the rights of women. Hence, the agencies mandated with social development should institutionalize gender-sensitization of the whole nation and include gender equality education in the school curricula.

The third implication is related to the need to enhance legal enforcement tools and inter-agency cooperation in addressing gender-based violence. Even though legal frameworks like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and the Child Rights Act have been enacted in Nigeria, the discussion shows that there are still loopholes in the implementation process due to the lack of awareness of legal provisions, a low level of law enforcement, and the social stigma that prevents victims of abuse to report abuse. This means that the role of social workers has expanded to advocate and help survivors navigate legal systems and obtain protection orders and seek justice through courts and law-enforcement agencies. Social workers are also expected to work in close coordination with the police officers, medical personnel, legal professionals, and non-governmental organizations to offer harmonious support to the victims. In this regard, this paper recommends that government should enhance institutional coordination mechanisms, train police and judicial officers on specialized gender-based violence training and create special GBV courts or fast-track prosecution systems to enable the perpetrators to be held accountable.

The fourth implication is the inclusion of gender-based violence prevention programs in social protection programs and economic empowerment programs. Economic and social factors like poverty, unemployment, economic dependence significantly reduce the capacity of women to get out of abusive relationships, as well as access justice. Livelihood support, vocational training, microcredit programs, and economic empowerment programmes, which facilitate the financial independence of women and increase their resilience, should be included in social work practice. The interventions will be able to help the survivors to restore their lives and also to reduce structural inequalities that perpetuate gender-based violence. The government social welfare programmes must at the policy level focus on providing economic empowerment to vulnerable women especially those

women who are in rural areas and those in conflict-stricken areas where the chances of violence are high. By incorporating gender-sensitive economic policies alongside social protection programmes, the survivors will receive assistance as well as curb the socio-economic disparities at large that have fuelled the continued existence of gender-based violence in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, gender-based violence continues to be a widespread social and human-rights issue in Nigeria which is generally conditioned by complex socio-cultural values, patriarchal ideologies, economic disparities, and weaker institutional responses. The literature shows that GBV occurs across various dimensions, such as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. Although laws like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and other national policies show the willingness of the Nigerian government to address the problem of GBV, the gaps in the implementation, the deeply rooted social stigma, and the lack of access to support services remain the factors that hinder providing effective protection to the victims. The social work interventions (especially psychosocial support, community education, policy advocacy, and multi-sector cooperation) is still critical to violence prevention, survivor support, and gender equality promotion. The solution to gender-based violence is thus a long-term effort on the part of the government institutions, civil society organizations as well as professional social workers to change the negative social norms, implement protective laws, and make the society of women and girls in Nigeria safer and more equal.

References

- Adegoke, T. G. (2017). Gender-based violence in Nigeria: Causes, consequences and policy responses. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(4), 95–107.
- Adetoro, A. A., & Musa, S. D. (2023). Social work intervention strategies in addressing gender-based violence in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Work and Human Services*, 5(2), 78–94.
- Adewale, A. A., & Adeyemo, T. A. (2024). Gender inequality and violence against women in Nigeria: Socio-economic drivers and policy implications. *African Journal of Gender and Development Studies*, 9(1), 45–62.
- Agbo, C. J., Okonkwo, P. I., & Nwafor, U. A. (2024). Legal and policy responses to gender-based violence in Nigeria: Progress, gaps and

- prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Public Policy and Administration*, 12(1), 101–118.
- Agwanwo, D. E. and Badey, D. (2022). Gender-Based Violence: An analysis of the socio-psychological Consequences of workplace sexual Harassment of Female Police Officers in Rivers State Police Command, Nigeria. *Journal of Gender and Development Studies*, 5(1): 7-25.
- Akari, I. (2025). Rape and murder of a young woman in Oyigbo Local Government Area, Rivers State.
- Akinlabi, O. M. (2020). Citizenship and policing in Nigeria: A case study of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Akinremi, R. (2019, November 26). Physical, spousal violence against women increases in Nigeria—Report. The International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR)
- Akinyemi, A. I. (2020). Gender inequality and policy responses to violence against women in Nigeria. *African Population Studies*, 34(1), 51–93.
- Akinyemi, O., Adeola, G., & Ibrahim, M. (2024). Evidence-based policy advocacy and the role of social workers in addressing gender-based violence. *Journal of Social Work Policy and Practice*, 6(1), 70–86.
- Amadi, L., & Nwankwo, C. (2023). Justice delivery and the challenges of prosecuting gender-based violence in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 16(1), 55–72.
- BBC Africa. (2019). South Africa is “the most unsafe place in the world to be a woman,” says Ramaphosa. BBC News.
- Bello, M. A. (2024). Gender norms, social inequality and violence against women in Nigeria. *Journal of African Gender Studies*, 8(1), 33–49.
- Chukwu, J. O., Okorie, P. N., & Eze, A. C. (2024). Institutional barriers to reporting gender-based violence in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Policy and Development Studies*, 14(2), 120–138.
- Durkheim, É. (1982). *The rules of sociological method* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1895)
- Egbejule, E. (2025). Activists call for state of emergency over rising gender-based violence in Nigeria.
- Eze-Anaba, I. (2017). Domestic violence and legal reforms in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. *Journal of African Law*, 61(2), 35–76.
- Ezechi, O. C., Musa, Z., David, A. N., & Idigbe, I. (2023). Gender-based violence in Nigeria: Trends, patterns and implications for public health and social policy. *Nigerian Journal of Clinical Practice*, 26(4), 60–98.
- Fawole, O. I. (2018). Economic violence to women and girls: Is it receiving the necessary attention? *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 19(1), 28–38.
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. (2020). National strategic framework for the prevention and response to gender-based violence in Nigeria. Abuja, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs.
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. (2021). National gender policy (Revised edition). Abuja, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs.
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. (2023). National strategic framework for the prevention and response to gender-based violence in Nigeria. Abuja, Nigeria: Federal Ministry of Women Affairs.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2003). Child Rights Act, 2003. Abuja, Nigeria: Government Printer.
- Ikpeze, N. I. (2024). Gender-based violence and legal protection mechanisms in Nigeria: An appraisal of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. *Nigerian Journal of Law and Gender Studies*, 6(1), 64–82.
- Joseph-Obi. & Agwanwo, D. E. (2019) Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria: Socio-Psychological Consequences of Rape Amongst Girl-Child Street Vendors in Port Harcourt Metropolis. *Port Harcourt Journal of Social Sciences*. 9, 280-315.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), & United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2022). Situation analysis of children and women in Nigeria 2021/2022. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Multiple indicator cluster survey 2021: Survey findings report. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics.
- National Population Commission (NPC), & ICF. (2019). Nigeria demographic and health survey 2018. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, MD: NPC and ICF.
- Nwosu, I. E. (2024). Community-based approaches to combating gender-based violence in Nigeria. *International Journal of Community Development Studies*, 11(2), 95–110.
- Ogunyemi, B., & Salawu, A. (2022). Socio-economic determinants of gender-based violence in Nigeria. *African Population Studies*, 36(2), 51–86.

- Okafor, E. E. (2024). Patriarchy, gender inequality and violence against women in contemporary Nigerian society. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 39(1), 87–105.
- Okeke, C. I., & Olatunji, A. O. (2025). Traditional institutions and community engagement in preventing gender-based violence in Nigeria. *Journal of African Social Development*, 10(1), 52–70.
- Okeke, N., & Okoye, U. (2019). The Child Rights Act and the protection of children in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Social Work*, 9(2), 45–53.
- Oladipo, T. O., & Yusuf, H. A. (2023). Economic disempowerment and vulnerability to domestic violence among Nigerian women. *Journal of Gender and Development in Africa*, 7(2), 88–104.
- Olatunbosun, A. (Ed.). (2015). Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015. National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- Oluwafunke, A. (2021). Multidisciplinary response to domestic and sexual violence in Lagos State: The role of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT). *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 14(2), 82–97.
- Onyema, N., & Eze, P. (2023). Challenges facing professional social work practice in Nigeria: Implications for service delivery. *African Journal of Social Work Practice*, 9(1), 21–38.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Free Press.
- Salim Adams, Y. (2024). Strengthening social welfare systems in Africa: Implications for social work practice in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 39(2), 112–129.
- Udo, I. A., & Etim, E. E. (2025). Psychosocial support and rehabilitation of survivors of gender-based violence in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Welfare*, 13(1), 44–60.
- UN Women. (2023). *Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*. New York, NY: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.
- UNICEF. (2023). *Child marriage and female genital mutilation in Nigeria: Statistical update*. Abuja, Nigeria: United Nations Children's Fund.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2025). *Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy report for Nigeria*. New York, NY: UNDP.
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2019). *Gender-based violence in Nigeria: Situation analysis and response strategies*. Abuja, Nigeria: UNFPA.
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). (2023). *State of world population 2023: 8 billion lives, infinite possibilities*. New York, NY: UNFPA.
- United Nations Women. (2022). *Progress on the sustainable development goals: The gender snapshot 2022*. New York, NY: UN Women.
- United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women*. New York, NY: United Nations.
- United Nations. (1995). *Beijing declaration and platform for action: Fourth world conference on women*. New York, NY: United Nations.
- United Nations. (2019). *Africa renewal report: Addressing violence against women in Africa*. New York, NY: United Nations Department of Global Communications.
- Usman, A. (2021). *Sexual exploitation of displaced women in internally displaced persons camps in Borno State*. Daily Trust investigative report.
- Williams, D. U., & Nyong, S. F. (2019). Prevalence, forms and factors of gender-based violence and violence against women and girls in Calabar, Nigeria. *Socialscientia: Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(4), 43–59.
- World Bank. (2019). *Gender-based violence (violence against women and girls): An overview*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2025). *Gender-based violence in Nigeria: Policy responses and development challenges*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Addressing violence against women in Nigeria: Policy and health sector responses*. Geneva: World Health Organization.