

# The Effects of Gender-Based Violence on the Wellbeing of Nigerian Women and Its Implications for Community Development

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## Abstract

*This study examined the important problem of gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria, a major infringement of human rights that primarily impacts women and girls. It highlighted the concerning frequency of gender based violence, with more than 27,000 recorded instances from 2020 to 2023, and examined its different forms, such as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. The research examined the physical, psychological, and socioeconomic effects of gender based violence on the wellbeing of Nigerian women and evaluated its influence on their involvement and leadership in community development programmes. The results indicated that gender based violence significantly harms women's health, curtails their economic prospects, and restricts their participation in community events, thus impeding overall societal advancement. The study highlighted the necessity of a multidimensional strategy to tackle gender based violence, promoting legislative changes, improved support services for victims, community engagement, and the alteration of damaging social norms. It also highlights the significance of enabling women by providing education and economic opportunities to build resilience against gender based violence. In conclusion, the article urges immediate measures to address gender based violence in Nigeria, advocating for gender equality and empowering women to succeed and meaningfully engage in their communities, crucial for sustainable development and societal progress.*

**Keywords:** *Gender-based violence, women's wellbeing, community development, legal reforms*

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## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) represents a major infringement of human rights that persists globally, affecting countless individuals across different cultures, societies, and economic levels. It is defined as any detrimental act directed at an individual because of their gender, primarily impacting women and girls, although men and boys may also be influenced. This problem is intrinsically connected to unequal power relationships, societal norms, and systemic bias, which perpetuate gender inequalities and hinder advancements toward gender equality (UN Women, 2020). Gender-based violence (GBV) occurs in multiple forms, such as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, happening in both public and private spaces. The figures are concerning, as the World Health Organization (2021) indicates that nearly one-third of women globally have faced physical or sexual violence at some point, frequently inflicted by a partner. The widespread violence severely affects individuals, families, and communities, perpetuating a cycle of violence and further marginalizing women and other susceptible groups.

Lately, Nigeria has seen a significant rise in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) incidents, with over 27,000 cases reported between 2020 and 2023. Throughout this period, there were 1,145 deadly incidents of violence, and 393 offenders were prosecuted, encompassing various forms of violence (National Human Rights Commission, 2023). According to UN Women (2023), the states that are mostly affected include Lagos, Sokoto, Adamawa, Ebonyi, and Cross River, where the UN's Spotlight Initiative has been actively working to address the issue. In 2023, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) recorded a total of 2,344 instances of gender-based violence, highlighting the prevalent nature and impact of this form of violence. These statistics highlight the crucial necessity to protect women and children from harmful acts, emphasising the significance of enforcing laws such as the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in every Nigerian state (NAPTIP, 2023).

Also, violence based on gender significantly affects the physical, mental, and emotional health of women. In Nigeria, women experience a greater prevalence of various types of gender based violence, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and detrimental practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). These infractions lead to immediate physical harm, long-term health issues, psychological suffering, and, in some cases, death (World Health Organization, 2021). As posited by Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe (2020), the effect of gender based violence on mental health is particularly alarming. Victims frequently suffer from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and various other mental health problems. The problems are exacerbated by the unfavourable view of GBV, causing numerous women to refrain from seeking help due to the risk of being shunned by their community. As a result, women's overall health is greatly affected in many Nigerian communities, restricting their capacity to actively participate in community development.

The consequences of gender based violence extend beyond the individuals affected, influencing whole communities. When women face violence, their capacity to contribute to the economic and social development of their communities diminishes. In Nigeria, the impacts of gender based violence are particularly detrimental because of the crucial roles women play in both formal and informal sectors (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). From an economic perspective, gender-based violence can lead to reduced productivity since affected women may find it difficult to work or may perform poorly due to the physical and psychological consequences of the violence. This not only diminishes household income but also impacts the broader economy, limiting opportunities for community development (Amnesty International, 2020). Furthermore, the costs associated with healthcare, legal support, and reduced productivity resulting from gender based violence strain public finances that could otherwise be allocated to development initiatives.

Socially, violence driven by gender perpetuates inequalities that obstruct sustainable development. In Nigeria, the tolerance of violence toward women reinforces male supremacy, limiting women's chances for education, employment, and political participation (British Council Nigeria, 2022). This impedes efforts to attain gender equality and hinders advancements in broader development goals.

This work has three specific objectives

- i. To investigate the physical, mental, and socioeconomic consequences of gender based violence on the wellbeing of Nigerian women.

- ii. To assess the impact of gender based violence on women's participation and leadership in community development initiatives in Nigeria.
- iii. To provide recommendations in addressing gender based violence and promoting women's wellbeing and community engagement in Nigeria.

## Literature Review

### **Physical, mental, and socioeconomic consequences of GBV on the wellbeing of Nigerian women and community development**

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue that predominantly affects women in Nigeria, influencing their physical, mental, and financial well-being. The impacts of GBV extend past the individual victims, obstructing overall community advancement. Gender-based violence (GBV) causes considerable physical harm to women in Nigeria, resulting in injuries, sexual and reproductive health complications, and lasting health challenges due to persistent violence. The World Health Organization (2023) states that physical violence can lead to injuries such as fractures, bruises, and internal bleeding, whereas sexual violence can result in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. Ezenwa, Chinwokwu and Ejue (2023) found that in Nigeria, numerous women lack adequate access to healthcare following incidents of violence, exacerbating their physical health problems. Moreover, pregnancy complications are common among victims of gender based violence. The Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) shows that numerous women experience violence during pregnancy, potentially resulting in miscarriages, early deliveries, or infants with low birth weights (National Population Commission, 2022). These physical health consequences adversely affect women's well-being, reducing their capacity to engage in economic activities in their households and communities.

The psychological consequences of gender-based violence are extremely harmful. People who encounter GBV are more likely to suffer from mental health problems like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts. A study conducted by Oladeji, Docrat, Abiona, Ogunbiyi, and Oladeji (2016) in Lagos, Nigeria, indicated that women experiencing intimate partner violence were at a higher risk for mental health disorders compared to those who did not experience such violence. Furthermore, the stigma linked to gender based violence leads to social isolation, worsening mental health issues. Numerous women fear being criticized or ostracized by their communities if they disclose the violence, which frequently causes them to endure in silence (Ezenwa, Chinwokwu & Ejue, 2023). This scenario can lead to enduring effects on their capacity to cultivate positive relationships, maintain employment, and participate in community events. The deterioration of mental health prevents victims from reaching their complete potential, in their personal lives as well as their careers.

The socioeconomic effects of gender-based violence on women in Nigeria are extensive. Many women who face violence are financially reliant on their abusers, which makes it challenging for them to leave harmful relationships. This reliance is worsened by job loss stemming from physical and mental health problems. According to Action Aid Nigeria (2019), women who suffer from gender based violence are less likely to find employment and are more prone to living in poverty, which creates a cycle of violence and economic hardship. The repercussions of gender based violence also impact the wider community. The World Bank (2019) indicates that violence against women diminishes overall productivity, as victims are unable to work,

and communities must allocate resources for healthcare, legal matters, and social services. Additionally, children raised in environments affected by gender based violence tend to achieve lower educational levels and income, thereby continuing the cycle of poverty across generations.

GBV hinders community development by reducing economic growth through loss of productivity and employment, as victims often cannot contribute to the workforce. It also disrupts social cohesion by isolating victims and limiting their participation in community initiatives. Furthermore, gender based violence undermines women's confidence and leadership potential, which are vital for grassroots development efforts in areas like farming, health education, and small businesses. As a result, community progress is slowed when women are held back by the effects of gender based violence.

### **Gender based violence on women's participation and leadership in community development initiatives in Nigeria**

The widespread occurrence of gender-based violence in Nigeria severely limits women's involvement and leadership in community development efforts. Community development focuses on enabling communities to identify and address their own needs, usually through joint initiatives (Kenny & Clarke, 2020). According to World Bank (2024), the involvement of women in these initiatives is essential, as their unique perspectives, abilities, and experiences contribute to more inclusive and effective development outcomes. Nonetheless, gender based violence acts as a major obstacle to women's participation. The anxiety about violence and the potential backlash from abusive partners or family can deter women from engaging in community activities or assuming leadership roles (Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt & Zimmerman, 2015). This problem is especially evident in conservative or traditional communities where women's involvement in public life is frequently discouraged.

Moreover, the effects of gender based violence on women's physical and mental health can impede their participation in community development initiatives. People who have gone through gender-based violence might face physical injuries, emotional turmoil, and decreased self-worth, which could impede their involvement in community activities or leadership positions (Ellsberg, Arango, Morton, Gennari, Kiplesund, Contreras & Watts, 2015). Furthermore, gender-based violence can also have broader socio-economic impacts that indirectly hinder women's participation and leadership in community development. For example, women might struggle to engage in community initiatives due to a reduction in income or resources resulting from gender based violence (World Bank, 2019). Additionally, the adverse views and societal exclusion associated with gender-based violence may push women into further marginalized roles, limiting their capacity to seek assistance and participate in their communities.

### **Recommendations in addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's wellbeing and community engagement in Nigeria**

Gender-based violence is a prevalent issue in Nigeria that significantly impacts women's health and their participation in society. A 2019 study revealed that 31% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, whereas 9% have encountered sexual violence (National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF, 2019). Violence based on gender adversely

affects women's physical and mental health, limits their economic and social opportunities, and obstructs their involvement in community activities.

To successfully address the urgent problem of gender-based violence in Nigeria, a thorough approach is essential, including legal changes, enhanced services, community involvement, and significant shifts in social norms. The Nigerian government should focus on improving legal safeguards for women, requiring the abolition of biased laws, the introduction of anti-gender based violence regulations, and the guarantee of their strict enforcement (Ogunsiji, 2020).

Alongside legal reform, enhancing the accessibility and quality of services for survivors of GBV is essential. This involves the creation of one-stop centres that offer combined medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance (Okenwa-Emegwa et al., 2021). Additionally, it is crucial to educate law enforcement and healthcare workers to properly recognize, support, and refer GBV cases (Chukwu et al., 2019). Equally important is the necessity to encourage community engagement and to confront the societal norms that sustain violence against women. Programs that involve men and boys as supporters, challenge damaging gender norms, and enhance women's leadership can foster enduring social transformation (Peacock & Barker, 2014). Moreover, faith-based groups and community leaders play a crucial role in transforming social narratives and rallying communities to combat gender based violence (Fawole et al., 2019).

Enhancing women's resilience and lowering their vulnerability to gender based violence is essential through economic empowerment via skills training, credit access, and backing for women-led businesses (Ifemeje & Ikpeze, 2013). Furthermore, enhancing girls' access to quality education and leadership roles is crucial for tackling the underlying issues of gender based violence and allowing women's complete involvement in their communities (Okwu & Azike, 2021). In conclusion, tackling GBV in Nigeria requires a comprehensive, evidence-informed strategy that highlights legal changes, improvement of services, alteration of social norms, and the economic and social empowerment of women. These initiatives will aid in fostering a fairer and more prosperous society where women can flourish and play an active role in their communities.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Patriarchal Theory**

Patriarchal Theory posits that gender-based violence (GBV) originates from the patriarchal system, which legitimizes and sustains male supremacy and female inferiority across different social, economic, and political structures. This theoretical viewpoint provides a framework for analysing how entrenched gender disparities in Nigeria fuel the occurrence and continuation of GBV, ultimately harming women's welfare and hindering community progress. Patriarchal Theory suggests that society is organized to favour men over women, with men possessing power and control in different social, political, and economic domains (Walby, 1990). Nigeria, similar to numerous societies, possesses prominent patriarchal frameworks. This leads to elevated rates of GBV, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and detrimental traditional practices.

In Nigeria, patriarchal customs often act to legitimize violence against women as a form of dominance and punishment. Gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), significantly

affects the physical and mental health of women. Individuals who suffer from GBV face a higher likelihood of sustaining injuries, experiencing chronic pain, and encountering mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (WHO, 2013).

Patriarchal structures limit women's access to financial resources, educational avenues, and job opportunities, which heightens their vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV) and lessens their ability to escape abusive situations. The dependency on male partners for financial support increases the chances of encountering violence, which in turn hampers their capacity to engage in the job market or seek income-producing endeavours. This pattern maintains a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement (Amnesty International, 2018).

Patriarchal standards often place the blame for the violence suffered by women on the victims, leading to their social isolation and stigmatization. People experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) can encounter exclusion from their communities, resulting in reduced access to social support networks and essential services. This separation amplifies the psychological effects of GBV and hinders women's ability to seek help and rebuild their lives (UN Women, 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) hinders community progress by undermining social unity and trust due to fear and division. It continues a cycle of violence through generations, strengthening detrimental patriarchal values. Furthermore, GBV incurs considerable economic and social expenses, depleting community resources and obstructing economic development by restricting women's involvement. Patriarchal Theory uncovers the profound gender disparities driving GBV in Nigeria, demonstrating its detrimental effects on women's welfare and community progress. To tackle GBV, it's crucial to confront patriarchal standards, advance gender equality, and equip women with the required resources and assistance.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative review of the literature to examine and analyse the relationship between gender-based violence on Nigerian women's wellbeing and community development. To ensure thorough coverage of relevant literature, electronic databases (such as textbooks, journal articles, official gazettes, conference papers and the internet etc) were searched, and references from selected studies were manually searched. A comprehensive search strategy was devised, utilizing keywords such as "gender-based violence," "women's wellbeing" "community development".

## **Conclusion**

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a widespread problem in Nigeria, significantly affecting women's welfare and hindering community progress. The analysis conducted shows that GBV has significant physical, mental, and socioeconomic effects on Nigerian women, preventing them from completely engaging in and benefiting their communities. The significant occurrence of GBV in Nigeria, with more than 27,000 cases recorded between 2020 and 2023, highlights the necessity of tackling this problem. GBV presents itself in multiple ways, such as physical violence, sexual assault, and detrimental traditional customs, all originating from entrenched patriarchal norms and gender disparities.

The effects of GBV reach beyond individual survivors, impacting whole communities. Women subjected to violence frequently endure decreased productivity, financial struggles, and social exclusion. Consequently, this restricts their involvement in community development efforts and leadership positions, denying communities important insights and abilities. Tackling GBV in Nigeria necessitates a holistic, multi-dimensional strategy that encompasses legal changes, enhanced support services for victims, community involvement, and initiatives to change social norms. Confronting patriarchal systems and fostering gender equality are crucial measures for building a society where women can prosper and play an active role in their communities.

Addressing GBV and its underlying causes can enhance the wellbeing of women in Nigeria while promoting more inclusive and sustainable community development. This will finally result in more robust, resilient communities and aid in the nation's overall advancement and prosperity.

### **Recommendations**

1. It is essential for stakeholders to initiate community awareness initiatives to inform the public about the physical and psychological health effects of GBV, with the goal of diminishing stigma and motivating victims to seek assistance.
2. Government and other non-governmental organizations should create initiatives that specifically seek to enhance women's involvement in leadership positions within the community. This may involve training and mentorship programmes that enable women to assume leadership roles.
3. Related stakeholders should create platforms for women to discuss their experiences and difficulties concerning gender based violence, nurturing a supportive community that promotes active engagement in development projects.

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