

Gender-based crimes against women in Katsina State Nigeria: Patterns, causes & response

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Abstract:

The main problem in this study is the increasing incidence of gender-based crimes against women in Katsina State, Nigeria. The research highlights recurring patterns of violence, examines the social, cultural, and economic causes, and assesses the effectiveness of institutional and community responses in preventing and addressing such crimes. This study aims to identify patterns of gender-based crimes against women in Katsina State, analyze the underlying causes, and evaluate the effectiveness of responses and interventions by institutions and the community. This study employed a qualitative design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore participants' lived experiences. Guided by Intersectional and Feminist Theories, data were collected through in-depth interviews with survivors and key informants from the Katsina State GBV Center. The study reveals that most GBV survivors in Katsina State are young, uneducated women facing resource deprivation and exploitation, particularly internal refugees. Cultural norms, poverty, and a weak judicial system hinder recovery. Although efforts have been made by the GBV Center and organizations, challenges such as delayed prosecution persist. Using feminist and intersectional theories, the study recommends awareness campaigns, support for internal refugee camps, timely legal action, GBV education in schools, and employment opportunities to empower women and reduce gender-based violence. The study contributes to emphasizing the need for an interdisciplinary approach using feminist and intersectional frameworks to understand victims' vulnerabilities. These findings encourage the development of more effective policies and integrated interventions to enhance the protection and empowerment of women in the region.



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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) involves harmful acts directed at individuals due to their gender and is widely condemned by both cultural norms and legal systems. Tan and Kuschminder (2022) explain that GBV stems from deep-rooted inequalities in gender power relations. In Nigeria, it is often perceived as a problem exclusive to women, children, and the elderly groups that report the highest number of cases. According to Quadri et al. (2024), these populations are particularly vulnerable in conflict zones like Northern Nigeria due to both social and biological factors. Gonalons-Pons and Gangl (2021) point out that the death or absence of male breadwinners often leaves families in severe economic distress. This issue is compounded by the growing number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who, after escaping violence, face increased risks of GBV in urban areas. Barbosa et al. (2023) note that women of reproductive age are especially at risk, sometimes engaging in survival sex in exchange for basic necessities. As Mangubhai et al. (2023) describe, GBV includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, along with threats and restrictions of freedom, all rooted in systemic gender inequality. Although anyone can experience GBV, women and marginalized groups face the greatest vulnerability, especially during crises.

Based on preliminary studies, research on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria shows that this phenomenon is influenced by structural and social factors. Tewabe et al. (2024) emphasize that the rise in GBV cases is linked to gender inequality and unequal power relations, particularly among refugees and internally displaced persons. Nagarajan (2024) notes that armed conflict involving Boko Haram since 2009 has worsened the risks of abduction and forced marriage among women and girls. Although the government has ratified CEDAW (Obradovic, 2015), the Maputo Protocol (Hefez et al., 2024), and the Child Rights Act (Enemo, 2021), their implementation remains limited. The World Bank (2019) and Mshelia (2021) regard this as a reflection of deep-rooted cultural resistance to gender equality. Ekhatior-Mobayode et al. (2022) found that the presence of Boko Haram increases intimate partner violence and controlling behavior within households. In Katsina State, REACH (2022) reported various forms of GBV, including physical assault, denial of resources, and forced marriage. Ozaki & Otis (2016) and Mellor et al., (2024) associate such violence with poverty and patriarchal norms, while UNICEF (2015) revealed that 43% of girls are married before the age of 18. Therefore, this study aims to identify types and causes of sex-based crimes and explore possible remedies.

Although numerous studies have examined gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria, most have concentrated on its general prevalence and national-level trends, providing limited insights into the situation in conflict-affected regions such as Katsina State. Existing literature tends to emphasize statistical data and broad socio-political explanations, yet offers little understanding of how GBV manifests in the daily lives of women and girls living under conditions of insecurity. Research has often overlooked the intersection of cultural beliefs, poverty, and weak legal enforcement that sustains gender-based crimes at the community level. Moreover, few studies have adopted intersectional and feminist analytical frameworks to explain how structural inequality, patriarchal norms, and conflict dynamics interact to perpetuate violence against women. This study therefore seeks to address these gaps by identifying the specific types and causes of GBV in conflict-affected areas particularly Katsina State and by exploring strategies and interventions that can strengthen community and institutional responses to sexual violence, child marriage, and intimate partner violence.

This study aims to identify the types of gender-based violence (GBV) occurring in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria, particularly in Katsina State, which has been plagued by armed attacks. It also seeks to examine the root causes of sex-based crimes, including sexual violence, child marriage, and intimate partner violence, as well as to explore possible strategies and interventions for addressing these issues. The research focuses on understanding how factors such as poverty,

insecurity, cultural beliefs, and weak legal enforcement contribute to the persistence of GBV in affected communities. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on GBV in conflict zones, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Practically, the findings are expected to inform policy formulation that better responds to the needs of GBV survivors, supports stronger legal frameworks, and promotes public awareness about the multi-dimensional impacts of GBV. Moreover, the study may serve as a valuable reference for humanitarian organizations and policymakers in designing effective interventions to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict-affected regions.

This study provides a preliminary conclusion that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria, particularly in Katsina State, is a complex issue driven by poverty, armed conflict, and weak law enforcement. Patriarchal values and discriminatory cultural norms reinforce gender inequality, while the implementation of policies and victim protection services at the local level remains suboptimal in addressing various forms of violence against women and girls. Based on these conditions, this research is directed to answer several key questions: What are the main causes of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Katsina State? What are the patterns and prevalence of GBV crimes occurring in the region? And how effective are the protection services and policies implemented for GBV survivors in Katsina? Through these questions, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the root causes and intervention strategies for GBV in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria.

METHOD

This study employs an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research design, a qualitative approach considered particularly effective for understanding how individuals make sense of their personal experiences in complex and sensitive contexts such as gender-based violence (GBV). Smith and Osborn (2015), who are leading figures in the development of IPA, emphasize that this method centers on participants' subjective realities and their lived experiences. It allows researchers to explore not just what participants experience, but how they interpret those experiences in light of their social and emotional contexts. In applying this framework, the study seeks to explore how survivors of sex-based crimes in Katsina State navigate trauma, stigma, and the recovery process. The IPA approach, as advocated by Hartman and Squires (2024), fosters deep and reflective engagement with participants, making it well-suited for examining emotional and psychological dimensions of lived experience. Through detailed interaction with individual narratives, researchers aim to identify shared patterns of meaning while respecting each participant's unique perspective. In regions where crimes like GBV are often underreported, this methodology is especially valuable as it amplifies survivors' voices and prioritizes their emotional safety and sense of agency in sharing painful stories.

The study adopted a non-probability purposive sampling technique, consistent with the core principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which prioritizes depth and detailed exploration over broad generalizability. Campbell and colleagues (2020), who have extensively discussed qualitative sampling strategies, emphasize that purposive sampling is particularly effective in IPA research, as it enables the selection of participants who can provide rich, first-hand insights into the phenomenon being studied. A total of twelve (12) survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) were selected in collaboration with the GBV Centre in Katsina State. These individuals were either registered with the Centre or were actively involved in its support or training programs. The inclusion criteria focused solely on the lived experience of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), without imposing demographic restrictions related to age, education, or marital status. Sovacool et al. (2018), noted for their contributions to research design in social sciences, assert that purposive sampling is particularly appropriate when ethical considerations and access constraints shape

participant selection. Participants were selected based on their availability during the data collection period and their willingness to engage in deep, reflective dialogue. This approach ensured that the sample was composed of individuals with direct experience of GBV, thereby generating data that was both meaningful and aligned with the study’s objectives.

Data collection involved both In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with survivors and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with officials from the GBV Centre, who possess institutional knowledge and frequent contact with survivors. A total of fourteen (14) interviews were conducted from 7 August to 10 September 2024. Interviews were carried out in the Hausa language to ensure clarity, comfort, and cultural sensitivity. They were later transcribed and translated into English for consistency in analysis. The use of IDI allowed survivors to narrate their experiences in a safe, confidential space, while KII provided context regarding systemic support, challenges, and trends. This multi-perspective approach strengthens the study's credibility and depth. Interviews were guided by semi-structured instruments, allowing flexibility while maintaining focus on core themes such as types of GBV, coping mechanisms, and institutional responses in Katsina State.

Data were analysed using a Matrix Table format, aligning responses with the study’s objectives for clear thematic organisation. This approach allowed the researchers to identify patterns and contrasts in participant narratives while preserving individual perspectives. The Matrix Table facilitated structured analysis and presentation in line with qualitative research standards. In terms of ethics, the study ensured anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent for all participants. Names and identifiable information were excluded from transcripts and reports to protect survivors from stigma or retaliation. Participants were informed about the research purpose, and interviews were only conducted with their voluntary agreement. Given the sensitivity of GBV-related data and the security concerns in Katsina, extra precautions were taken to prevent any harm to participants. This ethical adherence helped build trust and enabled participants to share their stories openly and safely.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

The data presentation and analysis are based on fourteen interviews conducted in Katsina State during fieldwork. This includes twelve in-depth interviews (IDIs) with survivors of gender-based violence and two key informant interviews (KIIs) with officials from the GBV Centre. These interviews provided detailed qualitative insights.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant	Age	Level of Education Completed	Employment Status	Marital Status	No. of Children
P1	56	Qur’anic School	Unemployed	Married	6
P2	29	Primary School	Unemployed	Married	5
P3	14	Junior Secondary School	Student	Single	NIL
P4	17	Primary School	Unemployed	Single	1
P5	23	Qur’anic School	Unemployed	Married	NIL
P6	20	Secondary School	Unemployed	Married	2
P7	23	Qur’anic School	Unemployed	Married	3
P8	45	Qur’anic School	Unemployed	Married	2
P9	36	Secondary School	Unemployed	Married	5
P10	27	Secondary School	Unemployed	Married	3
P11	19	Secondary School	Unemployed	Married	1
P12	21	Primary School	Unemployed	Married	2
P13	48	University	Employed	Married	4

P14	33	College of Education (NCE)	Employed	Single	NIL
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The data reveal that participants range in age from 14 to 56 years, mostly within the productive age group. Education levels are generally low, with many completing only Qur'anic, primary, or secondary schooling, and only two having higher education. Most participants are unemployed, indicating economic vulnerability that heightens exposure to violence. The majority are married with children, showing that GBV affects both single and married women. However, male victims and diverse socioeconomic groups are underrepresented, limiting the study's generalizability. Overall, the findings offer insight into the social and economic backgrounds of GBV survivors in Katsina and underscore the need for more inclusive data to strengthen targeted intervention strategies.

Katsina State hosts a dedicated GBV Centre located within the Multipurpose Centre in Filin Samji, Katsina city, established to address gender-based violence issues. The center provides temporary shelter and essential support services for women and girls displaced due to violence or rights violations. Despite these initiatives, GBV remains widespread and deeply rooted in the region. To address this challenge, organizations such as WRAPA, UNICEF, and the Ford Foundation collaborate to promote openness, encourage case reporting, and strengthen community awareness. These joint efforts aim to enhance survivor protection, improve access to justice, and build sustainable support systems for women and girls affected by violence in Katsina State.

Causes of gender-based violence in Katsina State

The causes of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Katsina State are complex and interconnected. They stem from entrenched cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality, economic hardships that increase vulnerability, and limited access to education and legal protections. Additionally, insecurity and the presence of armed groups exacerbate the situation, making women and girls more susceptible to violence. These factors combine to sustain and perpetuate GBV within the state.

Table 2

Causes of Gender-Based Violence

No	Causes	Description
1.	Culture	Forced marriages by some parents under the pretext of Islam push survivors into prostitution. Resource denial by parents, husbands, or guardians is also a key factor driving GBV in Katsina State.
2.	Poverty	Families unable to provide food resort to begging, exposing women and girls to sex for money and human trafficking.
3.	Resource Denial	Husbands often refuse to provide shelter, food, and medical care for their wives and children, forcing them into begging and exposing them to sexual violence.
4.	Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)	Insecurity causes migration to Katsina city; displaced women and girls become vulnerable to rape or resort to prostitution for survival. Some men exploit their poverty and IDP status by exchanging food or money for sex.
5.	Age	Women and girls under 30 years old are the most vulnerable group and the majority of survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the State.

The Matrix Table identifies four major crimes against women and girls in Katsina State, revealing that forced marriage remains a significant driver of gender-based vulnerability. Cultural pressure from parents to marry off their daughters often forces young women to flee their homes, leading some into commercial sex work for survival. One participant recounted being forced into marriage, later escaping to Abuja, where she became involved in prostitution and contracted a sexually transmitted infection and mental disorder. The data suggest a cycle linking lack of education, unemployment, and poverty factors that push women into transactional sex as a survival strategy.

A married woman with five children shared how her husband abandoned her without food or shelter after their rent expired, leaving the family homeless. With nowhere to stay, she and her

children resorted to sleeping in the open space of Katsina Central Market. A staff member from the GBV Centre in Katsina recounted rescuing the family and providing temporary shelter for three months. During her stay, the woman was enrolled in vocational training to gain skills for self-reliance after completing the program. This case highlights multiple dimensions of gender-based violence economic deprivation, family neglect, and institutional weakness in addressing abandonment. The lack of legal consequences for such husbands and the community’s limited informal support mechanisms exacerbate the vulnerability of women and children, threatening both their welfare and future survival.

Pattern/prevalence of gender-based violence crime in Katsina State

The pattern and prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Katsina State reveal a disturbing and persistent issue affecting women and girls across the region. Various forms of violence, including physical assault, sexual abuse, and forced marriage, are widespread, often exacerbated by cultural norms, poverty, and insecurity. The increasing frequency of armed attacks and displacement further compounds the vulnerability of survivors, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions and comprehensive support systems.

Table 3
Pattern/Prevalence GBV Crime

Participant	Common/Frequent	Less Common	Resource Denial
KII	About 60 per cent of the cases are rape in Katsina State	Exchange of food for money among the IDPS	Husbands leave their family members without food, clothing and shelter.
IDI	I was raped by our Gateman twice in my Secondary School, in 2023 and 2024. Ran out of luck this time, he is arrested now. I am 14 years old, in Junior Secondary School 2. My father had beaten me severely because he asked me to borrow money and give him. As a result of excessive beating, I started sleeping with men to get money to give to him. In that process, I conceived a pregnancy and gave birth to a baby girl.	My father forced me to marry a man against my will. I ran away to Abuja and became a commercial sex worker. I have been suffering from depression since 2015 because it was not my plan to become a prostitute.	My husband left me and joined a gang of criminals who are into kidnapping people for ransom. He forced me to join him in their hideouts, but I refused. The people of our village unanimously decided to force us out of the village for fear of my husband.

Note: Women for Women International, 2022

Table 3 reveals that the most frequent crimes committed by men against women in Katsina State include rape, economic deprivation, and neglect. Women remain the primary victims due to cultural and biological factors that position men as providers through religious and traditional marriage systems. The data indicate that rape is the most prevalent crime, often perpetrated by acquaintances and occurring in public institutions such as schools and workplaces. Additionally, many men fail to provide basic needs for their families, leaving wives and children in destitution. This economic neglect pushes some women and girls especially those displaced by armed conflict to engage in transactional sex for survival. Consistent with research conducted across ten Nigerian states, the most common gender-based crimes include physical assault, marital rape, sexual violence, and economic deprivation, reflecting widespread gender inequality and systemic vulnerability.

This correlates with the findings of a study conducted in Malumfashi and Matazu LGAS in Katsina State by the World Bank (2019). The findings revealed the following people affected by GBV crimes: Female children Young boys, People with disabilities, Child street hawkers, and Female students in college or higher education. Similarly, an ActionAid study reported that male school staff

seek out opportunities to obtain sexual favours, exploiting the poverty of students who struggle to pay their fees and who lack uniforms and books. Female students and their parents have complained to authorities about this occurring, but appeared powerless to stop it.

Protection services for the victims gender-based violence

Protection services and gender-based violence (GBV) policies play a critical role in safeguarding the rights, dignity, and well-being of survivors. These frameworks are designed to provide immediate safety, long-term support, and access to justice for victims. Effective GBV policies integrate legal, psychological, medical, and social interventions, ensuring a coordinated response. In regions with high GBV prevalence, such services are essential to promote healing, empowerment, and reintegration into society.

Table 4

Protection Service for the Victims/GBV Policy

Participant	Government	Community	Individual
KII	Katsina State provides mental health support and safe shelter through its Sexual Assault and Referral Centre. The Ministry of Women Affairs has established several committees Technical Working Group, Steering Committee, SOP, Working Group, and Surveillance Team to address GBV. The Surveillance Team reports cases to the Response Team, which then informs the Steering Committee for action. The state has domesticated the Child Rights Act and implements all relevant treaties protecting women and girls.	Community awareness is essential to identify where violence against women and girls (VAWG) occurs. Members should remain vigilant and protect vulnerable groups. Cultural practices, such as opposite-sex relatives sharing rooms, need discouragement. Religious and community leaders urge husbands to care for their families to prevent women from turning to commercial sex work.	Guardians are not protecting their children because of their age. Even male children are sexually abused. We treated cases of homosexuality in this Centre where underage male children were raped. Parents are enjoined not to allow small children to walk alone, especially at night or in quiet places.
IDI	GBV Centre has been supporting us with soap, diapers and a stipend since I was brought here in June 2024, I have been enrolled into the Women's Centre to learn a vocational skill to become self-reliant.	People in our community are now sympathising with our situation, especially those of us who gave birth to a child out of wedlock. The stigmatisation has reduced, unlike when I was pregnant. Some people thought I would abort the pregnancy.	Radio awareness campaigns help inform people about women's rights violations, especially in rural areas influenced by religion and culture. Katsina State also provides a hotline for reporting VAWG cases.

Table 4 highlights the existing GBV-related policies and services in Katsina State. The state established a GBV Centre that provides free legal aid, psychosocial support, and vocational training for survivors, particularly women abandoned by their families. Legal provisions in both the Penal Code and Shari'a Courts criminalize violence against women, yet conviction rates remain low due to weaknesses in the justice system and poor investigations. Studies confirm that survivors often face limited access to support services and networks. Although Nigeria has enacted the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, its protection is undermined by gaps such as the absence of marital rape recognition in the Constitution. Furthermore, only 18 of 36 states have adopted the VAPP law, resulting in inconsistent implementation and allowing sociocultural norms to override legal measures. This incomplete adoption limits the effectiveness of national GBV protection frameworks.

Discussion

Socio-economic portrait of survivors of gender-based violence

The findings indicate that the majority of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) survivors in Katsina State are women with low or no formal education. This condition limits their understanding of legal rights and their ability to recognize or report acts of violence. This aligns with Ojemeiri et al. (2022), who argue that low educational attainment exacerbates women's vulnerability to violence due to limited access to information and legal awareness. Similarly, Wilde et al. (2023) and Dalgarno et al. (2023) emphasize that education strengthens women's capacity to resist social subordination, while Small et al. (2024) note that women with limited education are more prone to economic dependence. Overall, low education contributes significantly to the heightened risk and powerlessness of survivors in facing gender-based violence.

This phenomenon reflects the relevance of feminist theory, which highlights how GBV thrives within unequal social structures where patriarchal norms normalize male dominance over women. Tong (2001) interprets this imbalance as a form of institutionalized social control, while Oparinde and Matsha (2021) assert that cultural legitimization of patriarchy traps women in a persistent cycle of violence. In line with this, Willey-Sthapit et al. (2023) argue that violence against women is a direct manifestation of institutionalized power imbalances within social systems. DeGue et al. (2023) further demonstrate that when masculinity is positioned as a symbol of superiority, societies become more permissive toward coercion and the devaluation of femininity, as observed in Katsina.

Empirical evidence from the GBV Centre in Katsina reinforces the feminist theoretical framework that highlights women's vulnerability within unequal social structures. Data reveal that most reported rape victims are girls under 18, who are not only physically vulnerable but also lack educational and legal awareness to protect themselves (Starke et al., 2024). These findings align with Saminu and Modibbo's (2023) analysis in Kaduna State, which underscores that illiteracy and systemic gender hierarchies heighten the risks and prevalence of GBV in impoverished areas. From a socioeconomic perspective, Mullin and Arce (2008) and Rowley et al. (2021) interpret structural poverty as a factor that weakens women's bargaining power against violence. Similarly, Dodman et al. (2017) and Gilbert and Shi (2023) note that densely populated and impoverished urban areas with weak social oversight become breeding grounds for sexual violence, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability among women and girls in Katsina.

Legally, Nigeria classifies rape as a serious offense punishable by life imprisonment under Section 358 of the Criminal Code (Uhnnoo et al., 2024). However, enforcement remains weak due to limited investigation and inconsistent legal implementation (Rohman et al., 2024). The gap between legal provisions and field practices reflects the inadequacy of protection for vulnerable groups. Uhnnoo et al. (2024) argue that the justice system's inability to hold perpetrators accountable perpetuates impunity and undermines survivors' trust. Strengthening law enforcement, public education, and economic empowerment programs for survivors in Katsina is therefore essential.

A feminist analysis of the causative factors of violence against women

From a feminist perspective, violence against women in Katsina cannot be understood merely as the result of individual circumstances, but rather as a product of social, economic, and political structures that place women in subordinate positions. Muhwezi et al. (2011) emphasize that poverty and hunger significantly increase vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in post-conflict or displaced contexts. This is reflected in metropolitan Katsina, where many women and female IDPs are forced to engage in commercial sex as a survival strategy (Lugova et al., 2020; Okafor et al., 2023). Lwamba et al. (2022) highlight how gender and economic inequalities compel women to treat their bodies as a last-resort resource. Comparative analysis indicates that these patterns are not a matter of free choice but rather the consequence of systemic pressures similar to those

observed in other post-conflict contexts, where poverty, displacement, and patriarchy intersect to reinforce women's subordination and risk of exploitation.

Within the feminist analytical framework, violence against women in Katsina represents a form of structural violence, where poverty and displacement are not merely social conditions but instruments of oppression that perpetuate gender injustice (Fotaki & Pullen, 2023). McAlpine et al. (2016) argue that women in vulnerable situations often face limited choices, compelling them to exchange sexual services for money, food, or shelter. This perspective underscores how patriarchal structures and economic inequalities create a "cycle of violence" that repeatedly positions women as victims of exploitation (Mensah, 2024). Compared to findings from other post-conflict settings, this pattern demonstrates consistency between systemic pressures and gendered subordination, wherein overlapping social and economic factors increase women's structural vulnerability to GBV.

The lack of adequate support systems, such as IDP shelters in Katsina, further exacerbates women's vulnerability to gender-based violence (Ekezie, 2022). Without sufficient protection, women and children face heightened risks of rape, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violence. Baynesagn and Tolla (2022) note that when husbands or family members are unable or unwilling to provide basic needs, women are often forced to beg or sleep outdoors, increasing their exposure to harm. Van Daalen et al. (2022) add that such conditions create environments highly prone to sexual and gender-based violence. From a feminist perspective, this situation reflects a systemic failure to support women, where economic and security burdens fall entirely on individual women without structural assistance, illustrating patterns of gendered subordination consistent with findings by Padavic et al. (2019) in organizational and patriarchal social contexts.

Furthermore, intersectionality theory helps explain how overlapping identities such as gender, refugee status, and poverty shape women's unique experiences of violence in Katsina (Bastia et al., 2022). Nartey (2023) emphasizes that the combination of these factors, alongside deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, creates a dual structure of oppression that limits women's agency and heightens their risk of exploitation. This pattern aligns with findings from Northeast Nigeria, where armed conflict and terrorism have forced women into transactional relationships for survival. Njoku and Akintayo (2021) observe that even when women seek protection, they often become targets of exploitation by those in power, including security personnel and humanitarian workers. Comparative analysis reinforces the understanding that gender-based violence results from the complex interaction of systemic social, economic, and political structures.

Patterns and prevalence of gender-based violence

Experts have noted that a major contributor to gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina is the pattern of neglect within family structures, particularly by male heads of household. Ndubisi (2016) explains that the failure or refusal of male family leaders to provide essential needs such as food, shelter, and basic care renders women and girls vulnerable to exploitation, including engagement in transactional sex as a survival strategy. This situation is exacerbated by cultural and religious norms in Hausa society, which, according to Schildkrout (2002), place sole responsibility for family sustenance on men, thereby increasing women's economic dependence and limiting their autonomy. Hutson (2001) further notes that such economic neglect often forces young girls into prostitution, demonstrating a direct link between parental economic incapacity and the violation of girls' rights.

Research also indicates that in some communities in Katsina, both male and female parents may exploit daughters or wives as collateral to obtain loans or basic necessities from local moneylenders. Fonjong and Gyapong (2021) emphasize that in such transactions, lenders sometimes demand sexual favors before providing assistance, further exposing women and girls to violence and exploitation. Resource denial is also common, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

Atuoye et al. (2021) highlight that forced displacement due to armed banditry exacerbates economic hardship, leaving women and children without food and shelter. Supporting this view, Alabi (2024) argues that prolonged armed violence in Nigeria disrupts access to education and healthcare, increasing vulnerability among women and children, while Ojeleke (2024) notes that armed conflict worsens food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly among refugee women and children.

Another prominent pattern is the pervasive culture of silence in Hausa communities, which significantly contributes to the underreporting of GBV. Ruback and Ménard (2001) observe that incidents such as rape, wife abuse, child neglect, and resource denial are rarely reported. Bachman (1998) emphasizes that Islamic teachings and Hausa customs strongly discourage family members from disclosing internal problems, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. Iloka and Eze (2022) further note that myths surrounding rape, ritual practices, and victim-blaming tendencies reinforce silence, weaken justice, and perpetuate the cycle of violence. Collectively, these findings indicate that GBV patterns in Katsina are shaped by family neglect, economic inequality, systemic exploitation, and cultural norms that restrict reporting, resulting in persistently high prevalence across communities.

Policies, interventions, and social support for victims of gender-based violence

Katsina State is one of the few states in Northern Nigeria to have domesticated both the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law. According to Ikuteyijo et al. (2024), Katsina was the first state in the region to establish a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Centre to coordinate, manage, and monitor GBV cases across the state. Participants in the study survivors of GBV in Katsina reported receiving various services at the Centre, which has a Technical Working Group operating in all 34 Local Government Areas. Sherchan et al. (2017) highlight that comprehensive GBV centres typically provide psychosocial support, medical care, temporary shelter, legal aid, and vocational training all of which are available free of charge at the Katsina GBV Centre. Supporting vulnerable mothers, organizations such as Safe Children and UNICEF provide essential items, including diapers, soap, and financial stipends, consistent with Pérez-Escamilla et al. (2016) who emphasize maternal support in humanitarian contexts.

The legal department of the Katsina GBV Centre plays a crucial role in supporting survivors by providing legal guidance and representation. Michelis et al. (2024) argue that access to legal aid significantly enhances justice for GBV victims, particularly in contexts where systemic barriers exist. However, challenges persist: Clark (2022) notes that limited community involvement and occasional non-cooperation from medical professionals undermine case prosecution, as medical testimonies are essential. Porcedda (2023) further emphasizes that compromised or incomplete medical reports often lead to case collapse, allowing perpetrators to escape accountability. Comparative analysis indicates that these gaps reflect structural weaknesses in both legal and healthcare systems, highlighting the need for coordinated interventions. In response, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs has outlined targeted strategies under Nigeria's National Gender Policy to strengthen GBV response systems and provide comprehensive support to survivors.

Kurian et al. (2024) emphasize that an effective GBV response begins with ensuring comprehensive support services for survivors, including medical care, psychosocial assistance, and legal aid, while creating safe and respectful environments that preserve dignity for all affected individuals. Building on this, Guaita-Fernández et al. (2024) stress strengthening legal systems through reforms that protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable, alongside public education to raise awareness about GBV's harmful consequences. Capasso et al. (2022) add that deterrence through punishment, combined with well-structured response mechanisms, is critical for effective policy implementation. These perspectives suggest that integrated approaches combining prevention, legal enforcement, and survivor support are key to addressing GBV in Katsina.

Key policy objectives focus on implementing the VAPP Act comprehensively across Nigeria to create a unified legal framework against GBV (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). Measures include harsher penalties for offenders, capacity building for law enforcement to improve investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), development of efficient database systems, upgrading forensic infrastructure, and creating a sexual offenders registry. Darjee and Russell (2012) highlight the importance of regularly reviewing and updating SGBV laws to close legislative gaps and ensure ongoing victim protection.

Achieving these goals also requires continuous sensitization campaigns to reduce stigma, as emphasized by Anguzu et al. (2023) and Upadhyay et al. (2023), alongside advocacy targeting traditional and community leaders who influence social norms (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021). Securing adequate funding for essential victim support services, including medical, legal, and psychosocial care, and fostering strong networks among NGOs, development agencies, and stakeholders are vital to coordinate interventions. Together, these strategies create a holistic and sustainable framework to prevent GBV and support survivors in Katsina.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most GBV survivors in Katsina State are young and uneducated women, indicating weak protection mechanisms and a fragile criminal justice system. Despite Islamic and legal provisions supporting women's rights, many women face resource denial, abuse, and forced sexual exploitation especially Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) due to insecurity. Cultural norms, poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to justice further hinder survivors from seeking redress. Although the GBV Centre Katsina and various organisations are creating awareness and providing support, challenges persist due to delayed prosecutions, poor rural outreach, and financial constraints. Theoretical insights from feminist and intersectional frameworks show how overlapping vulnerabilities perpetuate GBV. The study recommends expanding awareness campaigns, establishing IDP camps, enforcing prompt legal action, integrating GBV education into school curricula, and offering automatic job opportunities to educated girls. These efforts aim to empower women, reduce poverty, and address systemic inequality that sustains gender-based violence in Katsina State.

Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce the perspectives of feminist and intersectionality theories, which emphasize that gender-based violence (GBV) occurs within a socially unequal context where economic status, gender, education, and refugee status intersect and heighten women's vulnerability. These structural inequalities normalize violence against women and girls, making it socially accepted and difficult to eliminate. Practically, the study highlights the need for comprehensive interventions by the government and NGOs, such as improved legal services, the provision of refugee camps, gender-based education in schools, and the economic empowerment of women. The government also needs to promote cultural change through collaboration with community and religious leaders. Therefore, a multidimensional approach is necessary to reduce GBV and create a more just and safe social environment for women and girls.

This study is limited in scope, covering only selected areas in Katsina State and involving a limited number of participants; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to the entire northern region of Nigeria. Additionally, constraints in time and resources hindered an in-depth exploration of the psychological dynamics of survivors and a comprehensive assessment of institutional responses. For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies across different states in Nigeria facing similar issues, and to adopt a mixed-methods approach to allow qualitative and quantitative data to complement each other. Further studies should also involve a broader range of stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, religious leaders, and GBV perpetrators, to

provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions in addressing gender-based violence across diverse social and cultural contexts.

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