



Gender-Based Violence as a Public Health Crisis: Consequences for Nigerian Women and Society

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Abstract: Gender-based violence (GBV) has emerged as a critical public health crisis worldwide, particularly in developing nation like Nigeria. The pervasive nature of GBV poses significant challenges to public health, human rights, and socio-economic development. Therefore, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria remains a pervasive issue with far-reaching physical, mental, societal, and economic consequences. This study investigates the primary forms and prevalence rates of GBV, its physical and mental health impacts, societal and economic consequences, and mitigation strategies. Findings reveal that physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and harmful traditional practices are the most prevalent forms of GBV, with significant prevalence rates among women aged 15–49. The study revealed that these acts of violence result in severe physical injuries, reproductive health complications, and chronic illnesses, alongside profound psychological impacts such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies. The findings revealed that societal consequences of GBV include disrupted family structures, educational disparities, and social instability, while the economic implications range from reduced productivity and increased healthcare costs to the perpetuation of poverty. Also, cultural norms, patriarchy, stigma, and limited access to healthcare exacerbate the effects of GBV, creating barriers for survivors seeking justice and support. The study recommends the launching of nationwide awareness campaigns to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate GBV through the involvement of traditional and religious leaders, educators, and influencers to foster community-wide behavioral change and increase awareness about the rights of women and the consequences of GBV.

Keywords: GBV, Patriarchal norms, Inequalities, Nigeria and Sexual violence

I. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) has emerged as a critical public health crisis worldwide, particularly in developing nation like Nigeria. GBV encompasses a wide range of harmful acts perpetrated against individuals based on their gender and is deeply rooted in unequal power dynamics, cultural norms, and systemic inequalities. The pervasive nature of GBV poses significant challenges to public health, human rights, and socio-economic development (Airaoje et al., 2023). For Nigerian women, the consequences are profound, affecting their physical and mental health, socio-economic opportunities, and overall quality of life. In Nigeria, gender-based violence is deeply rooted in cultural and structural inequalities. Studies highlight the significant role of patriarchal norms, poverty, and inadequate legal frameworks in perpetuating GBV. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), approximately 30% of Nigerian women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence, underscoring the widespread nature of the problem.

In Nigeria, gender-based violence manifests in various forms, from physical and sexual violence to psychological abuse and economic exploitation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), physical violence, such as intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage, are widespread in the country. A study by Adebayo et al. (2018) revealed that intimate partner violence (IPV) affects 36% of Nigerian women, with rural areas reporting higher levels of abuse. Furthermore, sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment, is alarmingly prevalent in both urban and rural areas (Airaoje et al., 2024).

Sexual violence in Nigeria is compounded by a cultural stigma that silences victims. Victims often face societal backlash, which deters many from seeking help or reporting crimes. For instance, women who have been raped are often blamed for the violence, with their reputations questioned and their experiences ignored (UN Women, 2019; Ahmed & Msughter, 2022). Similarly, harmful practices such as early marriage, which is still common in some Nigerian communities, place girls at risk of both physical and psychological trauma, further perpetuating the cycle of violence (UNICEF, 2020; Airaoje et al., 2024). As a result, gender-based violence has increasingly been recognized as a public health crisis, particularly impacting women and girls. In addition, Nigeria with its large and diverse population faces significant challenges in addressing gender-based violence within its healthcare, legal, and societal structures. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore the multifaceted impacts of GBV on Nigerian women and its ripple effects on society, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive intervention strategies.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the primary forms and prevalence rates of GBV among Nigerian women?
2. How does GBV impact the physical and mental health of women in Nigeria?
3. What are the societal and economic consequences of GBV in Nigeria?
4. How can GBV be mitigated in Nigeria?

II. Review of Literature

The UN defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN, n.d.). The ILO defines gender-based violence as violence that is directed against an individual or group of individuals based on their gender identity. GBV encompasses violence against women and girls as well as against men and boys, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI), and other individuals who do not conform to dominant gender roles (Aondover et al., 2025).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasingly recognized as a critical global issue in contemporary society, though perceptions of it vary widely across cultures and regions (UN Women, 2021). Many nations have responded by adopting comprehensive laws and policies aimed at combating various forms of GBV, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and harmful cultural practices. This progress is further supported by a growing acknowledgment of intersectionality, as GBV is understood to intersect with factors such as race, class, disability, and sexual orientation (World Health Organization, 2021). However, despite these advances, significant challenges remain. In many societies, survivors of GBV continue to face stigma and victim-blaming, especially in settings where patriarchal norms are

Deeply entrenched (Amnesty International, 2022). Cultural practices like child marriage or honor-based violence can further complicate efforts to address GBV, as they are often justified under the guise of tradition (UNICEF, 2022). However, there has been a notable shift in narratives around GBV, moving from viewing individuals as victims to emphasizing their resilience as survivors, alongside increasing demands for accountability and systemic reform to address perpetrators' actions (Freedman, 2016; Aliough et al., 2023).

The framing of GBV as a public health issue has also gained traction, reflecting its far-reaching consequences on physical and mental health and its economic burden on individuals and communities. While GBV has historically been viewed as an issue affecting women and girls, there is growing recognition that men, boys, and non-binary individuals can also experience it, prompting a more inclusive understanding (Jewkes et al., 2015). Also, technology has played a dual role in shaping perceptions of GBV. On one hand, it has facilitated new forms of violence, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and revenge pornography (Henry & Powell, 2018). On the other hand, digital platforms have become powerful tools for advocacy, awareness-raising, and providing support to survivors (UN Women, 2021; Aondover et al., 2022).

However, disparities in addressing GBV persist globally. While some countries have made significant strides, others lack the legal and institutional frameworks necessary for meaningful progress. In conflict zones and fragile states, GBV remains pervasive and often goes unaddressed (UNHCR, 2021; Aondover & Aondover, 2023). According to True (2012), the normalization of GBV in many areas and resistance to feminist or rights-based advocacy present ongoing barriers to change. Nevertheless, the contemporary world is increasingly viewing GBV as a systemic issue requiring multi-faceted solutions. This includes addressing underlying structural inequalities, challenging harmful norms, and ensuring survivors are supported and empowered. While progress has been made, achieving a world free of GBV demands sustained effort and global solidarity (Heise, 2011).

2.1 GBV in Developed Countries

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant social and public health issue that persists in developed countries, despite substantial progress in gender equality and legal protections. GBV refers to harmful acts perpetrated against individuals based on their gender and includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse (United Nations, 2022). Although developed nations often have lower prevalence rates than low- and middle-income countries, the widespread nature of GBV in these contexts highlights systemic challenges in addressing societal power imbalances and cultural norms that perpetuate violence (World Health Organization, 2021; Aondover et al., 2022).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains one of the most pervasive forms of GBV in developed nations. In the United States, an estimated 25% of women and 10% of men report experiencing severe physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC 2022). Similarly, in Canada, IPV accounts for nearly one-third of all police-reported violent crimes (Statistics Canada, 2021). European countries also report troubling trends, with approximately 33% of women experiencing physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, FRA, 2020). These figures highlight that wealth and resources do not equate to immunity from the prevalence of GBV (Hile et al., 2022).

Sexual violence is another critical issue in developed countries. In Australia, one in six women and one in twenty-five men report experiencing sexual violence since the age of 15 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In the European Union, it is estimated that more than 20 million women have experienced sexual harassment in professional settings (FRA, 2020). In addition, workplace harassment, particularly sexual harassment, further demonstrates the pervasiveness of GBV in environments where individuals should feel safe and empowered. Furthermore, transgender and nonbinary individuals in developed countries also face disproportionate levels of violence (Kurfi et al., 2021). A 2015 survey conducted in the United States found that 47% of transgender respondents experienced sexual assault at some point in their lives, with higher rates among transgender people of color (James et al., 2016). These statistics indicate that GBV transcends traditional gender binaries, affecting marginalized groups in distinct and severe ways.

Several systemic and structural factors contribute to the persistence of GBV in developed countries. Gender inequality, while less overt than in some developing nations, continues to manifest in wage gaps, unequal political representation, and entrenched societal attitudes. These disparities perpetuate power imbalances that foster environments where violence can occur. For instance, women in leadership roles often face heightened risks of harassment and discrimination, deterring broader participation in political and corporate arenas (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). In addition, cultural attitudes and social norms also play a significant role in maintaining GBV. In many developed countries, victim-blaming narratives persist, discouraging survivors from reporting abuse or seeking justice. A lack of comprehensive education on consent, gender equity, and healthy relationships further exacerbates the issue, allowing harmful stereotypes and behaviors to go unchallenged (Flood, 2019; Msughter, 2020).

Inadequate legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms compound these challenges. Although most developed countries have laws against domestic violence and sexual harassment, inconsistencies in enforcement, lenient sentencing for perpetrators and insufficient victim support services undermine their effectiveness (Council of Europe, 2020; Msughter & Idris, 2023). For example, in some jurisdictions, marital rape is still not explicitly criminalized, reflecting lingering cultural resistance to addressing GBV comprehensively in some developed countries.

2.2 GBV in Africa

Studies on sexual assault and gender-based violence (GBV) in Africa reveal alarming statistics. For example, among 367 high school girls in Ethiopia, 11.4% had engaged in sexual activity, with 33.3% of those experiences being rape (Gebremariam et al., 2018). In South Africa, a study reported a prevalence of 2,070 rapes per 100,000 annually, and a more recent estimate indicates that a woman is raped every 83 seconds, with only 1 in 20 cases reported (Smith & Moyo, 2020; Msughter & Phillips, 2020). Similarly, in Zimbabwe's Midlands Province, 25% of women reported attempted or completed rape by an intimate partner (Chitiyo et al., 2017). Moreover, over 90 million African women and girls have undergone female circumcision or genital mutilation, with 2 million girls affected annually (UNICEF, 2019). These statistics underscore the widespread nature of GBV across the continent, starting from childhood in many cases.

The social and economic impacts of violence against women (VAW) pose significant threats to development worldwide. In response, governments and organizations have implemented various initiatives to combat GBV. International frameworks such as the

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) aim to address the issue (United Nations, 2021; Msughter et al., 2023). The United Nations designated November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, reflecting global recognition of the problem and a call to action (UN Women, 2022).

Despite these efforts, GBV remains pervasive in the 21st century, highlighting persistent gaps in prevention and enforcement. While legislative progress has been made in many countries, the prevalence of GBV continues to affect millions of women and girls globally. International actors strive for effective preventive and punitive measures, but the enduring nature of this issue underscores the need for sustained advocacy, comprehensive policies, and robust enforcement to achieve meaningful change (World Health Organization, 2023; Msughter et al., 2023).

2.3 Common Forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern Nigeria

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a widespread issue in Nigeria, with distinct forms and drivers in the northern, southern, western, and eastern regions. The cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors in these areas shape the manifestations of GBV. Below is an analysis of the common forms of GBV in each region.

a. Northern Nigeria

In northern Nigeria, GBV is often rooted in cultural and religious practices that subordinate women and girls (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019; Msughter et al., 2022). The following are common forms of GBV in the region:

- i. **Child Marriage** Child marriage is widespread in northern Nigeria, with many girls married off before the age of 18. This practice is driven by poverty, religious interpretations, and cultural norms. According to UNICEF (2020), the North-West and North-East regions have the highest rates of child marriage in Nigeria, with over 60% of girls married before their 18th birthday.
- ii. **Domestic Violence** Domestic violence, including physical and emotional abuse, is prevalent. Patriarchal norms that position men as heads of households often lead to the normalization of spousal abuse (Amnesty International, 2018).
- iii. **Sexual Violence in Conflict** Northern Nigeria has experienced significant conflict due to insurgency by groups such as Boko Haram. Women and girls are frequently subjected to sexual violence, including abduction, rape, and forced marriage (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

b. Southern Nigeria

Southern Nigeria, characterized by relative urbanization and a mix of ethnic groups, has its unique GBV challenges:

- i. **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment, particularly in workplaces and educational institutions, is a common form of GBV (Namadi & Aondover, 2020). A study by Ojanuga (2017) found that many women in the South-South and South-East regions experience harassment but rarely report it due to fear of stigmatization.
- ii. **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** IPV is widespread in the region. Cultural beliefs that promote male dominance contribute to physical, emotional, and economic abuse of women by their partners (National Population Commission, 2018).

- iii. **Harmful Widowhood Practices:** In parts of the South-East, harmful traditional practices are inflicted on widows. These include forced confinement, shaving of heads, and deprivation of inheritance rights (Eze-Anaba, 2006; Msughter et al., 2023).

c. Western Nigeria

Western Nigeria, home to the Yoruba ethnic group, also grapples with GBV influenced by cultural and socioeconomic factors:

- i. **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** FGM remains a significant issue, particularly in rural areas. Despite legal prohibitions, the practice persists due to deep-rooted cultural beliefs. The National Bureau of Statistics (2021) reported that the South-West has one of the highest FGM prevalence rates in Nigeria.
- ii. **Economic Violence:** Women in western Nigeria frequently face economic violence, including denial of access to resources, financial control by partners, and workplace discrimination (Akinbami & Oladipo, 2019).
- iii. **Sexual Violence:** Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prevalent, with urban areas like Lagos recording high incidences. Poor law enforcement and societal stigmatization hinder justice for survivors (Fapohunda, 2020; Vitalis et al., 2025).

d. Eastern Nigeria

In eastern Nigeria, the Igbo culture heavily influences GBV manifestations. Key forms of GBV include:

- i. **Inheritance Rights Violations:** Women in the South-East are often denied property inheritance under customary law, leaving them economically vulnerable (Chukwu, 2015).
- ii. **Harmful Traditional Practices:** Practices such as the "Osu caste system," which stigmatizes certain families, perpetuate social discrimination and psychological abuse, particularly against women (Okafor & Onuoha, 2018).
- iii. **Domestic and Sexual Violence:** Both domestic and sexual violence are significant issues, exacerbated by patriarchal norms and lack of effective legal redress mechanisms (National Human Rights Commission, 2020).

2.4 Empirical Review

Recent empirical studies provide a deeper understanding of the prevalence, impact, and responses to gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. The 2020 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reported that 36% of women in Nigeria have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) at some point in their lives, highlighting the widespread nature of the issue (NDHS, 2020). The survey also revealed significant regional disparities, with rural areas showing higher prevalence rates. These disparities are often attributed to limited access to resources, lower levels of education, and entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate GBV (Okeke et al., 2022).

A study by Oladepo et al. (2019) explored the health outcomes of GBV survivors in urban Nigeria, emphasizing its profound psychological consequences. The study found a strong correlation between exposure to GBV and mental health challenges, with survivors reporting higher rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation. This evidence underscores the urgent need for integrated mental health services tailored to GBV survivors in urban settings (Oladepo et al., 2019). Similarly, Ezeh et al. (2021) investigated the economic implications of GBV in Nigeria. The study estimated that the country loses over \$1.5 billion annually due to reduced workforce participation,

productivity losses, and healthcare expenses associated with GBV. Such economic costs highlight the broader societal implications of GBV, extending beyond its immediate victims.

Intervention programs aimed at mitigating GBV in Nigeria have shown mixed results. Community-based initiatives, such as the Girls' Education Project (GEP), have made significant strides in reducing child marriage rates in Northern Nigeria by improving access to education and raising awareness about GBV (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020). However, systemic barriers, including weak enforcement of GBV-related laws, inadequate funding, and deep-rooted cultural resistance, hinder the scalability and long-term sustainability of these interventions (Aluko & Adeyemi, 2023). Therefore, the empirical evidence suggests that effective responses to GBV in Nigeria require a multifaceted approach. This includes educational programs targeting community awareness, comprehensive legal reforms to enhance the prosecution of GBV cases, and improvements in healthcare systems to provide holistic support for survivors. Additionally, greater investment in economic empowerment programs for women could help mitigate the structural inequalities that fuel GBV (Ajayi & Olorunfemi, 2022).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

One of the leading proponents of liberal feminist theory is Mary Wollstonecraft, whose seminal work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) laid the foundation for modern liberal feminism. In the 20th century, feminist scholars such as Betty Friedan, through works like *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), advanced liberal feminist ideas, focusing on societal reforms to address gender inequalities (Friedan, 1963; Obada et al., 2024).

Liberal feminist theory is rooted in the principles of equality, individual rights, and justice. It emphasizes the need to eliminate systemic barriers that restrict women's access to opportunities, education, and economic participation, thereby ensuring gender equality in both public and private spheres. This theory primarily focuses on reforming existing societal structures rather than dismantling them, advocating for equal rights through legal, social, and policy reforms (Tong, 2009; Obada et al., 2021). The theory has been instrumental in advancing women's suffrage, workplace rights, and access to education, often aligning with broader liberal ideals of freedom and equality (Freedman, 2002; Vitalis et al., 2024). It is pragmatic and reform-oriented, targeting the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of fairness (Tong, 2009). Liberal feminist theory provides a framework for understanding gender-based violence (GBV) as a consequence of systemic inequality and discrimination against women (Obada et al., 2021). It highlights the role of cultural, legal, and institutional barriers that perpetuate GBV, emphasizing the need for:

- a. Legal reforms to criminalize acts of GBV (Tushnet, 2009).
- b. Policy measures to protect survivors and provide equitable access to justice (Lloyd, 2011).
- c. Education and public awareness campaigns to challenge societal norms that normalize violence against women (Gingrich, 2003).

a. Strengths of Liberal Feminist Theory

1. **Pragmatic Approach:** Focuses on achievable reforms within existing structures, making it practical and implementable (Tong, 2009).
2. **Advocacy for Legal Protections:** Has led to significant advancements in women's rights, including anti-discrimination laws and policies addressing GBV (Freedman, 2002).
3. **Inclusivity:** Emphasizes individual rights, making it adaptable to diverse societal contexts (Lloyd, 2011).

4. **Influence on Policy:** Plays a critical role in shaping policies that promote gender equality, such as workplace protections and educational opportunities (Tushnet, 2009).

b. Weaknesses of Liberal Feminist Theory

1. **Overemphasis on Legal Solutions:** May overlook deeper structural and cultural issues that perpetuate inequality and GBV (Tong, 2009).
2. **Focus on the Public Sphere:** Often prioritizes workplace and legal reforms, sometimes neglecting private sphere inequalities like domestic violence (Gingrich, 2003).
3. **Class and Race Blindness:** Critics argue that it sometimes fails to address the intersections of race, class, and other forms of oppression that compound gender inequality (Collins, 2000).
4. **Neglect of Systemic Change:** By aiming to work within existing systems, it may not fully challenge or dismantle patriarchal structures that underpin GBV (Lloyd, 2011).

c. The Nexus between the Theory and the Research

In GBV research, liberal feminism underscores the importance of advocating for equal rights and legal protections as a way to prevent and address violence, while also examining the socialization processes that sustain unequal gender roles (Usman et al., 2022; Oreoluwa et al., 2024). Therefore, while liberal feminist theory has been pivotal in advancing gender equality and addressing GBV through legal and policy reforms, its limitations call for a more comprehensive approach that includes cultural, structural, and intersectional analyses to create lasting change.

III. Research Methods

The study uses secondary data such as significant texts, journals, newspapers, official publications, historical documents and the Internet. However, the research was strictly limited to available or recorded information about the primary forms and prevalence rates of GBV among Nigerian women, how GBV impact the physical and mental health of women in Nigeria, the societal and economic consequences of GBV in Nigeria and the mitigation of GBV in Nigeria (Pate et al., 2020). The study adopts content analysis as its method of analysis, whereby the existing literature will be considered for the analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Q1. What are the primary forms and prevalence rates of GBV among Nigerian women?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical public health and human rights issue in Nigeria, affecting millions of women across various regions and age groups. The most common forms of GBV include physical violence, sexual violence, emotional/psychological abuse, and harmful traditional practices (UNICEF, n.d.). These forms of violence are pervasive and significantly impact the physical and mental well-being of Nigerian women. They are discussed in details below.

a. Physical Violence

Physical violence remains one of the most reported forms of GBV in Nigeria. It involves acts such as hitting, slapping, or other forms of physical harm. Research indicates that approximately 30% of Nigerian women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence at some point in their lives (Tribune Online, 2024). This statistic underscores the widespread

nature of physical violence and highlights the urgent need for preventive measures and victim support services.

b. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, which includes rape, sexual harassment, and other non-consensual acts, is another prevalent form of GBV in Nigeria. According to recent reports, 30% of women in the 15–49 age bracket has suffered from sexual violence, often perpetrated by intimate partners or acquaintances (Tribune Online, 2024). Sexual violence has devastating consequences, including psychological trauma, physical injury, and social stigma, which often deter survivors from seeking help.

c. Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse involves behaviors that cause emotional harm, such as verbal threats, humiliation, and controlling actions. Although data on the national prevalence of emotional abuse is limited, a study among adolescents in Lagos State revealed that 62.1% of respondents identified emotional abuse as a significant form of GBV. This finding suggests that emotional abuse is a common but underreported issue in Nigeria, often overlooked due to societal norms and lack of awareness.

d. Harmful Traditional Practices

Harmful traditional practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, persist in many Nigerian communities despite national and international efforts to curb them. FGM is particularly common in certain regions, with estimates suggesting that a considerable proportion of Nigerian women have undergone the practice (UNICEF, n.d.). Similarly, child marriage remains a pressing issue, especially in rural areas, where cultural and economic factors often force young girls into early unions. These practices violate women's rights and have long-term physical and psychological consequences.

4.2 Q2. How does GBV impact the physical and mental health of women in Nigeria?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) significantly impacts the physical and mental health of women in Nigeria. This phenomenon reflects the systemic inequalities and cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women, leading to profound health consequences.

a. Physical Health Impacts

The physical health impacts include injuries and trauma, sexual and reproductive health issues, and chronic health conditions. They are discussed below.

1. Injuries and Trauma

GBV often involves physical violence, which can result in immediate injuries such as fractures, bruises, burns, and lacerations. In severe cases, this violence leads to long-term disabilities or even death (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Studies in Nigeria reveal that domestic violence, a prevalent form of GBV, frequently leads to hospitalization and chronic physical conditions (Fawole et al., 2020).

2. Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues

Sexual violence, including rape, contributes to gynecological injuries, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (Ajayi & Abimbola, 2021). Survivors of GBV may face complications during childbirth, such as obstetric fistulas, which are linked to sexual violence and early marriages common in some Nigerian communities (Oladapo et al., 2019)

3. Chronic Health Conditions

Prolonged exposure to violence can lead to chronic pain disorders, gastrointestinal problems, and cardiovascular diseases. Stress caused by GBV affects hormonal regulation, leading to long-term physical health problems (WHO, 2021).

b. Mental Health Impacts

The mental health impacts include post-traumatic disorder, depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and self-harm, and substance abuse. Below is a brief discussion on each.

1. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Survivors of GBV frequently experience PTSD, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares, and heightened anxiety. Nigerian women who survive sexual violence report severe psychological distress, compounded by societal stigma (Okafor et al., 2019).

2. Depression and Anxiety

GBV is a significant risk factor for depression and anxiety among women. Many survivors report feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and an inability to cope with daily life (Abiola & Udofia, 2020). The stigma associated with GBV in Nigeria exacerbates these mental health challenges, often deterring survivors from seeking help.

3. Suicidal Ideation and Self-Harm

Exposure to GBV is associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation and self-harm. Studies indicate that survivors in Nigeria often struggle with feelings of shame and isolation, which can lead to suicidal behavior (Onigbogi et al., 2020).

4. Substance Abuse

To cope with the trauma of GBV, some survivors turn to substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs. This coping mechanism not only worsens their physical and mental health but also perpetuates cycles of abuse and social marginalization (Ajayi & Abimbola, 2021).

c. Cultural and Structural Factors Exacerbating the Impact

The cultural and structural factors exacerbating the impacts include stigma and silence, limited access to healthcare, and cultural norm and patriarchy. They are discussed as follows:

1. Stigma and Silence

Many Nigerian communities stigmatize survivors of GBV, blaming them for the violence or ostracizing them. This societal response discourages women from reporting abuse or seeking medical and psychological support (Okafor et al., 2019).

2. Limited access to Healthcare

The lack of adequate healthcare facilities and trained personnel in Nigeria hampers survivors' access to essential medical and mental health services. This inadequacy prolongs the physical and psychological effects of GBV (Oladapo et al., 2019).

3. Cultural Norm and Patriarchy

Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms normalize violence against women in many parts of Nigeria. This cultural acceptance limits women's autonomy and creates environments where GBV flourishes unchallenged (Fawole et al., 2020).

4.3 Q3. What are the societal and economic consequences of GBV in Nigeria?

Societal and Economic Consequences of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria
Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria has far-reaching societal and economic implications, affecting individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole. Below is a detailed analysis of these consequences.

a. Societal Consequences

1. Public Health Crisis

GBV significantly contributes to public health challenges in Nigeria. Survivors often suffer physical injuries, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Amnesty International, 2022). Additionally, women and girls exposed to violence are at a higher risk of mortality, either directly through violent acts or indirectly through health complications arising from the abuse (WHO, 2021).

2. Educational Disparities

GBV exacerbates gender inequality in education. Practices such as child marriage, which affects 43% of girls in Nigeria before age 18, often result in school dropouts (UNICEF, 2020). Survivors of GBV also face stigma, emotional trauma, and financial barriers that hinder their ability to complete their education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and illiteracy (Nwadinobi et al., 2018).

3. Social instability

High rates of GBV undermine family structures and community cohesion. Domestic violence disrupts household dynamics, while survivors often experience social isolation and stigmatization. Communities plagued by GBV witness reduced trust and civic participation, further destabilizing the social fabric (ActionAid Nigeria, 2021).

b. Economic Consequences

1. Reduced Economic Productivity

GBV affects women's ability to participate effectively in the economy. Survivors often experience absenteeism from work or loss of employment due to physical injuries, psychological trauma, and stigma (UN Women, 2022). A study in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that a 1% increase in the prevalence of GBV reduces women's economic activities by up to 8%, which translates into significant GDP losses (World Bank, 2019).

2. Increased Healthcare Cost

The physical and psychological consequences of GBV impose a heavy financial burden on Nigeria's healthcare system. Resources are diverted to treat survivors, addressing injuries, infections, and mental health conditions, which strains the already overburdened health sector (WHO, 2021).

3. Perpetuation of Poverty

GBV perpetuates poverty by limiting women's access to economic opportunities. Survivors often lose jobs or face barriers to employment, reducing household income. In rural areas, where women are primary contributors to agricultural labor, GBV undermines productivity and food security (Oxfam Nigeria, 2022).

4. International Impacts

The economic and educational setbacks caused by GBV have long-term implications. Children in households affected by GBV often experience poor health, lower educational attainment, and limited economic opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality (UNDP, 2021).

4.4 Q4. How can GBV be mitigated in Nigeria?

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a critical challenge in Nigeria, perpetuated by deeply ingrained sociocultural norms, economic inequalities, and weak enforcement of protective laws. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach involving policy reform, education, community engagement, and improved access to services for survivors. Below are detailed strategies for mitigating GBV in Nigeria, supported by references in APA format.

a. Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

Implementation and Enforcement of Existing Laws: Nigeria has laws addressing GBV, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, but enforcement remains weak in many states (Okafor & Emeka, 2021). Ensuring that these laws are implemented nationwide and creating accountability mechanisms are crucial. **Harmonizing Legal Systems:** The coexistence of statutory, customary, and religious laws in Nigeria often creates gaps in protecting women and girls. Legal reforms should harmonize these systems to ensure universal protection (UN Women, 2020).

b. Enhancing Education and Awareness

Community Education Campaigns: Awareness campaigns targeting rural and urban areas can challenge cultural norms that perpetuate GBV. These campaigns should involve traditional leaders and influencers to ensure acceptance (Okechukwu & Adesanya, 2020). **School-Based Interventions:** Introducing GBV awareness and gender equality education into school curricula can help shape attitudes and reduce tolerance for violence over time (UNESCO, 2021).

c. Economic Empowerment of Women

Skills Development Programs: Providing women with vocational training and financial literacy can reduce economic dependence on abusive partners, a significant risk factor for GBV (Adebayo et al., 2019). **Microfinance Initiatives:** Access to small loans and grants enables women to start businesses, increasing their financial autonomy and resilience (World Bank, 2022).

d. Improving Access to Support Services

Comprehensive Healthcare for Survivors: Establishing more accessible and well-equipped shelters, trauma centers, and healthcare facilities can provide immediate support for survivors (Oluwatosin & Afolabi, 2021). **Hotlines and Crisis Centers:** Free, 24/7 helplines and crisis centers offering psychological support and legal aid can help survivors seek help confidentially (Amnesty International, 2021).

e. Engaging Men and Boys

Promoting Positive Masculinity: Programs that involve men and boys in discussions about healthy relationships and respect can address harmful gender norms (Heise & Manji, 2016). **Peer Education Programs:** Engaging male youth in peer education initiatives helps create role models and change agents within communities (Nwankwo et al., 2020).

f. Improving Data Collection and Research

Nationwide Surveys on GBV: Regular, comprehensive data collection can identify patterns of violence and inform targeted interventions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). **Collaboration with Research Institutions:** Partnerships with universities and NGOs can generate insights into GBV's root causes and effective solutions (Ogunjimi et al., 2021).

g. Strengthening Partnerships and Coordination

Collaboration Among Stakeholders: Multisectoral partnerships involving government agencies, NGOs, religious organizations, and international bodies can maximize the reach and effectiveness of GBV interventions (UNFPA, 2021). **Community-Led Approaches:** Programs co-designed with local communities are more likely to be culturally sensitive and sustainable (Olaniyi & Ahmed, 2020).

V. Conclusion

Gender-based violence (GBV) has emerged as a critical public health crisis worldwide, particularly in developing nation like Nigeria. The pervasive nature of GBV poses significant challenges to public health, human rights, and socio-economic development. Therefore, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria remains a pervasive issue with far-reaching physical, mental, societal, and economic consequences. This study underscores the prevalence and multifaceted nature of GBV, identifying physical violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and harmful traditional practices as its primary forms. These acts of violence inflict significant physical harm, including injuries, reproductive health complications, and chronic health conditions, while also causing profound psychological distress, such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The societal stigma and limited access to healthcare further exacerbate these impacts, hindering survivors' recovery and perpetuating cycles of abuse.

The societal and economic implications of GBV are equally alarming. It disrupts public health, education, and family structures, contributing to social instability. Economically, GBV reduces productivity, imposes healthcare costs, and entrenches poverty, undermining national development. The long-term effects extend to future generations, perpetuating inequality and limiting opportunities for children in affected households.

Effective mitigation of GBV requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Strengthening legal frameworks, harmonizing statutory and customary laws, and ensuring enforcement are essential steps. Community education campaigns, school-based interventions, and the promotion of positive masculinity can challenge harmful cultural norms and foster gender equality. Additionally, improving access to healthcare and support services, alongside enhanced data collection and research, is vital for informed, targeted interventions.

Collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and community stakeholders is critical to creating sustainable, culturally sensitive solutions. By addressing GBV through policy reform, education, economic empowerment, and community engagement, Nigeria can make meaningful progress toward protecting women's rights, improving public health, and achieving sustainable development.

Recommendations

1. Launch nationwide awareness campaigns to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate GBV through the involvement of traditional and religious leaders, educators, and influencers to foster community-wide behavioral change and increase awareness about the rights of women and the consequences of GBV.
2. Implement vocational training, financial literacy programs, and microfinance initiatives to reduce women's economic dependence on abusive partners.
3. Promote programs that involve men and boys in discussions about positive masculinity, healthy relationships, and respect for women.
4. Ensure the full implementation of existing legal frameworks, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, across all Nigerian states. Establish accountability mechanisms and train law enforcement officials to respond effectively and sensitively to GBV cases.

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