

## Gender-Based Crimes Against Women in Katsina State, Nigeria: Patterns, Causes & Response

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### Abstract:

This study was conducted in Katsina State, Nigeria, to collect qualitative data from survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and providers of protection and support services. The research addressed two key questions: What are the types of sex-based crimes occurring in the area? What are their causal factors and possible remedies? A qualitative research design was adopted, utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of each participant. Intersectional and Feminist Theories were employed to explain the underlying causes of GBV in Katsina. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with survivors and key informant interviews with staff of the Katsina State GBV Centre. The study shows that most GBV survivors in Katsina State are young, uneducated women facing resource denial and exploitation, especially IDPs. Cultural norms, poverty, and weak justice systems hinder redress. Despite efforts by the GBV Centre and organizations, challenges like delayed prosecutions persist. Using feminist and intersectional theories, the study recommends awareness campaigns, IDP camps, timely legal action, GBV education in schools, and job opportunities to empower women and reduce gender-based violence. This study makes a significant contribution by revealing the complex causes of gender-based violence in Katsina State, particularly the links between poverty, patriarchal culture, and weaknesses in the legal system. It also emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach using feminist and intersectionality theories to understand victims' vulnerabilities. The findings encourage the development of more effective policies and integrated interventions to enhance protection and empowerment of women in the region.

**Keywords:** Gender-Based Violence, Cultural Belief, Vulnerability of Women and Girls,

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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

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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.

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to escalate in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-affected areas like the Northeast. A study by Tewabe et al. (2024) revealed 1,777 reported cases of GBV, including sexual, physical, and psychological violence. Victims—ranging from minors to elderly women—faced gang rape, captivity, starvation, and physical torture. Survivors reported severe trauma, social isolation, and dropping out of school. Armed conflict, especially involving Boko Haram since 2009, has heightened risks of abduction and forced marriage for women and girls (Nagarajan, 2024). Similar patterns of sexual exploitation have been documented in other crisis-affected African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo. GBV is often rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances, particularly in refugee and internally displaced populations (Tewabe et al., 2024). Despite Nigeria's ratification of key frameworks such as CEDAW (1985), the Maputo Protocol (2004), and the Child Rights Act (2003), implementation remains uneven. Only 24 out of 36 states have adopted the Child Rights Act, with 12 northern states rejecting it due to Shari'ah law conflicts (World Bank, 2019). This lack of legal uniformity and enforcement reflects deep-rooted cultural resistance to gender equality and weakens GBV prevention and protection efforts (Mshelia, 2021).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a persistent issue in Nigeria, particularly in regions affected by armed conflict. A quasi-experimental study in Northeast Nigeria revealed that Boko Haram's presence increases the likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV) by 4 percentage points, and controlling behaviour by 14 percentage points (Uche et al., 2022). In Katsina State, women and girls experience GBV in various forms, including physical assault, resource denial, and forced marriage (REACH, 2022). The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2018 found that 31% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence (ROLAC, 2023). Socio-cultural norms, poverty, and insecurity exacerbate this violence, while patriarchal beliefs sustain a culture of silence. From 2015 to 2024, armed attacks in Katsina by bandits have increased the vulnerability of women and girls, especially in LGAs like Batsari and Jibiya (REACH, 2022). Child marriage is also widespread, with 43% of girls married before 18 (UNICEF, 2015). These conditions make GBV a multidimensional threat rooted in poverty, illiteracy, and weak legal protection. Therefore, this study aims to identify types and causes of sex-based crimes and explore possible remedies.

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.

## 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

The table data reveals a wide age range of participants, from 14 to 56 years, with most falling within the productive age group. Education levels are generally low, with many having completed only Qur'anic, primary, or secondary schooling, and only two participants having higher education. This suggests that GBV victims often come from limited educational backgrounds. Most participants are unemployed, except for two who are employed, indicating economic vulnerability that may worsen the impact of violence. The majority are married with varying numbers of children, showing that GBV affects not only single women but also those within marital homes. However, the data lacks representation of male victims and other socioeconomic statuses, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Overall, the data provides valuable insight into the backgrounds of GBV survivors in Katsina, but the sample's demographic limitations should be considered to enhance understanding and develop more effective intervention policies.

Katsina State hosts a specialized facility known as the GBV Centre, situated within the Multipurpose Centre in Filin Samji, Katsina city, which is specifically dedicated to addressing issues related to gender-based violence. This center plays a crucial role by offering temporary shelter and support services to women and girls who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of experiencing violence or violations of their fundamental rights. Despite these efforts, gender-based violence remains a pervasive and pressing problem within Katsina State. To combat this, organizations such as WRAPA, UNICEF, and the Ford Foundation have been working closely together to foster a culture of openness surrounding the topic and to encourage survivors and communities to report cases of violence against women and girls (VAWG). These collaborative initiatives aim to

increase public awareness, enhance survivor protection, and ensure more effective support systems are in place for those affected.

### Causes of GBV 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 GBV**

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.

Matrix Table 1 has identified four different crimes against women and girls in Katsina State. Some of the causes were exacerbated by a culture of forced marriage by the parents, which led some of the girls to run away from their matrimonial homes since they love their husbands and hence venture into commercial sex work or prostitution. One of the participants narrated how her father forced her to marry someone against her choice, but she left Katsina for Abuja, where she joined a group of sex workers in the Mpape area in Abuja. The denial of her right to choose a husband of her choice led her to venture into prostitution and subsequently contract a sexually transmitted infection and a mental disorder.

It could be deduced from the data in Table 1 that a lack of formal education leads to unemployment, and unemployment leads to poverty. Girls and women who are in poverty are prone to engage in transactional sex (willing exchange of sex for money among people who are not strangers). This has become a common practice in Katsina State. This agrees with the findings of Babatunde and Durowaiye (2014). Girls between the ages of 16 and 25 years old in North Central Nigeria are into sexual relationships as an economic survival strategy or as a way to improve their economic status. This explains the causal relationship among factors that push girls and women in parts of Northern Nigeria where poverty is endemic.

A married woman with five children explained how her husband abandoned her without food and shelter. She was left with children after their house rent had expired, and her husband fled the town. The woman and her children have nowhere to sleep, hence they resorted to sleeping in an open space in Katsina Central Market. One of the Staff members of the GBV Centre Katsina explained how they rescued the woman with her children and gave them a temporary shelter for three (3) months. At the Centre, the woman was enrolled on vocational training to enable her to learn a skill or trade that she would be doing to earn a livelihood after the completion of the training. This form of denial not only affects the mother but also the future of their children if they survive infant mortality. This data revealed multiple forms of GBV: resource denial, family neglect, lack of a strong

framework to punish husbands who abandoned their families, and weak informal support among the community members in Katsina State, which is established to handle such cases.

### Pattern/Prevalence of GBV 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.

Table 3 shows the most frequent crime that some men have been perpetrating against women in some parts of Katsina State. Women were the major victims of gender-based crimes in Katsina State because of their biological makeup and social constructs, which made a man marry a woman based on religious and cultural rites, hence he is the one to provide shelter, clothing and feeding for his family members. It could be identified from the above data that rape was the prevalent crime in Katsina State mostly occurring among acquaintances and in public institutions such as schools and workplaces. Furthermore, other forms of crimes identified are resources for their family members, which left the wife and children in destitution, hence some of the wives and girls indulge in the exchange of sex for money or food handouts, especially among those displaced by armed violence in some parts of Katsina State. Research conducted in ten (10) States in Nigeria revealed the prevalent crime against women are: physical violence (husband beating), marital rape, rape and economic deprivation ([Women for Women International, 2022](#)).

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 ([ActionAid, 2011](#)).

### Protection Services for the Victims/GBV Policy

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 portrays existing policies and services that are available for the victims of GBV in Katsina State. Katsina State Government is one of the few States that established a GBV Centre to provide services and assistance for the survivors. There exist in Katsina State free legal services at the GBV Centre that provide legal services for the victims of GBV free of charge. There are also psychosocial support services for survivors who have undergone traumatic situations. Similarly, there is also skills acquisition where women who were evicted or rejected by their family or the head of the family abandoned them, are enrolled to learn a vocational skill that will enable them to be self-reliant by engaging in income-generating activities. There are laws in the Penal Code in both conventional and Shari'a Courts that punish violence against women and girls in the State. However, the level of conviction for GBV crime is low in the State, partly because of a faulty criminal justice system. There is a rate of reports of GBV cases to the Police. There is a rate of prosecution of GBV cases by the Police. The conviction of suspects lies on the strength of investigations conducted by the Police and the weight of evidence presented before the court. These findings from Katsina State have been corroborated by a study on violence against women which found that for women and girls who are subject to domestic violence, it is not merely a case of increased proximity to perpetrators, but also decreased access to support networks and critical support services, both of which would otherwise serve to mitigate the magnitude and effects of the violence (Darkwah, 2022). Supporting the findings from Katsina State, Women for Women International (2022) stated that in Nigeria, there are existing legal frameworks that punish GBV and other forms of violence against persons. The extant laws in the VAPP legislation include provisions for and protections against physical offences including those that disproportionately affect women such as "...female genital mutilation; forceful ejection from

home; forced financial dependence or economic abuse; forced isolation; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; harmful widowhood practices; and spousal battery, among others." However, the Nigerian Constitution does not recognize marital rape as a crime and includes a section which says that a man cannot be convicted of rape of his wife, as long as his wife has reached puberty. This leaves marital rape as an important loophole and oversight in the VAW protections framework between the VAPP and Constitution in Nigeria. Though the government passed VAPP at the national level and is now seeking to expand the legislative scope and language, only 18 out of Nigeria's 36 states have adopted the VAPP legislation to make it a binding law within that state.<sup>12</sup> This sporadic and incomplete countrywide adoption may pose a challenge to the implementation of any comprehensive VAW legal framework within Nigeria and may create space for sociocultural norms and traditions to supersede legal permissibility when it comes to the acceptability of VAW.

## Discussion

### Sociodemographic Characteristics of the participants

The findings indicate that the majority of gender-based violence (GBV) survivors in Katsina State are women with either no formal education or who did not complete their primary or secondary education. According to Ojemeiri, Aondover, and Aruaye (2022), this lack of education contributes significantly to survivors' limited understanding of their rights, as well as their inability to recognize signs of sexual harassment or other forms of abuse, thereby reducing their capacity to avoid dangerous individuals or environments, or to report incidents to the appropriate authorities or guardians. This phenomenon aligns with the core principles of feminist theory in sociology, which posits that GBV tends to flourish in societies where structural inequalities are deeply entrenched and normalized. Willey-Sthapit et al. (2023) emphasize that feminist theorists view such violence as a manifestation of systemic power imbalances, wherein patriarchal norms legitimize the subjugation and victimization of women. From this perspective, when masculinity is positioned as superior, it creates a social environment where coercion, oppression, and the devaluation of femininity become pervasive. This theoretical framework is supported by empirical evidence from the GBV Centre in Katsina, which shows that most of the reported rape survivors are girls under the age of 18. This reflects a broader pattern whereby perpetrators target minors who are not only physically vulnerable but also lack the educational resources and legal awareness to report crimes or advocate for their rights. Similar findings were reported by Saminu and Modibbo (2023) in Kaduna State, further reinforcing the argument that illiteracy and systemic gender hierarchies exacerbate the risk and prevalence of GBV.

The study revealed that sexual abuse targeting children and young individuals is widespread in insecure regions of northern Nigeria. Despite numerous reports and prosecutions of such crimes, the frequency of these incidents continues to increase steadily. Areas characterized by overcrowding and slum-like conditions experience significantly higher rates of sexual violence, according to Saminu and Modibbo (2023). This environment creates a vulnerable setting where children and youth are at greater risk of victimization. In response to these challenges, Nigerian law strictly prohibits rape under Section 358 of the Criminal Code Act. The law mandates severe penalties for perpetrators, including life imprisonment, with or without the additional punishment of caning. This legal framework underscores the seriousness of rape as a crime and serves as a deterrent. However, ongoing efforts are necessary to ensure effective enforcement of these laws and to protect vulnerable populations from increasing rates of sexual violence in affected communities.

### Causes of GBV in Katsina State

According to Muhwezi et al. (2011), poverty and hunger are key factors that contribute to the increase of gender-based crimes (GBC), particularly in post-conflict or displaced settings. This



perspective is relevant to the situation in the metropolitan area of Katsina State, where many women and girls—especially those categorized as internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing from conflict-affected regions—are compelled to engage in commercial sex as a means of survival (Okafor et al., 2023). These individuals are frequently found in urban centers such as Katsina metropolis, seeking refuge from the insecurity and violence of their places of origin. Experts argue that the combination of displacement status, economic hardship, and social marginalization exposes women to heightened risks of exploitation. McAlpine et al. (2016) further emphasize that in such vulnerable conditions, women are often left with no viable options other than to accept money, food, or shelter in exchange for sexual services. This reflects a distressing cycle in which poverty and insecurity drive women into exploitative situations under the guise of survival.

Experts highlight that the lack of adequate support systems, such as internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Katsina, significantly exacerbates the challenges faced by displaced women and children. Without access to safe shelter, these vulnerable groups are at greater risk of various forms of violence. Scholars such as Baynesagn and Tolla (2022) note that, in many cases, husbands are either unable or unwilling to provide essential needs like food, housing, and healthcare, forcing women and children into precarious situations such as begging or sleeping outdoors without protection. Furthermore, van Daalen et al. (2022) emphasize that such conditions place these individuals in environments where the risk of rape, transactional sex, and other gender-based violence is alarmingly high. This analysis underscores how the overlapping challenges of poverty, displacement, and neglect of basic necessities intensify the susceptibility of women and girls to exploitation and abuse, especially during crises.

From a sociological perspective, this situation can be understood through the theory of intersectionality, which highlights how overlapping identities—such as gender, poverty, and displacement—increase vulnerability and the likelihood of discrimination and abuse. In Katsina State, the combination of these factors, along with deeply rooted patriarchal norms, significantly contributes to the rise in gender-based violence. This condition mirrors findings from Northeast Nigeria, where armed conflict and terrorism have forced women into transactional relationships as a means of survival. Njoku and Akintayo (2021) observe that although these women seek protection and aid, they often become even more exposed to exploitation—sometimes by those in positions of power, including security personnel and humanitarian workers. This underscores how power structures and social systems can intensify injustice and harm toward vulnerable groups.

### **Pattern/Prevalence of GBV Crime**

Experts have noted that one of the core contributors to gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina State is the pattern of neglect within family structures, particularly by male heads of households. 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 engaging in transactional sex as a means of survival. This situation is further compounded by cultural and religious norms in Hausa society, which, according to Schildkrout (2002), place the responsibility of family provision solely on the male figure. Such deeply rooted beliefs contribute to the economic dependence of women on men, thereby limiting their autonomy. Hutson (2001) adds that this economic neglect often forces young girls into prostitution, illustrating a direct link between parental economic incapacity and the violation of girls' rights. These conditions highlight how poverty and structural inequality foster the persistence of GBV in the region.

Scholars have observed that in some communities within Katsina State, both male and female parents engage in exploitative practices by using their daughters or wives as collateral to secure loans or obtain food and other essentials from local moneylenders. Fonjong and Gyapong (2021) emphasize that in such transactions, lenders sometimes demand sexual favors before approving

financial or material assistance, further exposing women and girls to gender-based violence and exploitation. Additionally, resource denial has been identified as a common form of abuse, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Atuoye et al. (2021) highlight that forced displacement caused by armed banditry has worsened economic hardship, leaving many women and girls without basic necessities such as food and shelter. This inability to meet social and financial responsibilities puts both mothers and children at serious risk. Supporting this view, Alabi (2024) argues that prolonged armed violence in Nigeria has severely disrupted access to education and healthcare, increasing vulnerability among women and children. Ojeleke (2024) further asserts that armed conflict exacerbates food insecurity, significantly heightening malnutrition rates, particularly among displaced women and children.

Researchers have identified that the pervasive culture of silence within Hausa society significantly contributes to the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina State. Ruback and Ménard (2001) point out that incidents such as rape, wife battering, child neglect, and various forms of resource denial are rarely reported to authorities in both rural and urban settings. This silence is deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs. According to Bachman (1998), Islamic teachings and Hausa customs strongly discourage family members from disclosing internal issues to outsiders, regardless of the severity or frequency of abuse. In many Hausa and Fulani communities in Northern Nigeria, revealing such matters is considered taboo, thereby enabling perpetrators to act with impunity. This cultural norm of silence and shame contributes to the rising cases of rape and domestic violence, as both male and female victims often suffer quietly within their homes. Iloka and Eze (2022) reinforce this view by explaining that in Northern Nigerian communities, myths surrounding rape are not only driven by fear of stigmatization but also by cultural practices such as ritual cleansing and societal tendencies to blame the victim. These dynamics collectively undermine justice and perpetuate cycles of abuse by protecting offenders under the guise of family honor.

### **Protection Services for the Victims/GBV Policy**

Katsina State is one of the few states in Northern Nigeria that has 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-related cases across the state. Participants in this study—all survivors of GBV in Katsina—reported having received various services at the Centre, which has a Technical Working Group present in all 34 Local Government Areas. Sherchan et al. (2017) highlight that comprehensive GBV centres typically offer psychosocial support, medical services, temporary shelter, legal aid, and vocational training—services which are all available at the Katsina GBV Centre, free of charge. Pérez-Escamilla et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of supporting nursing mothers in humanitarian contexts, and in Katsina, organisations like Safe Children and UNICEF provide diapers, soap, and financial stipends to mothers at the shelter. The legal department of the Centre also plays a critical role in supporting survivors, as affirmed by Michelis et al. (2024), who argue that legal aid can significantly improve access to justice for GBV victims. However, challenges remain—particularly the limited involvement of community members in combatting GBV and the occasional lack of cooperation from medical professionals, whose testimonies are vital in prosecuting sexual violence cases. When physicians compromise reports, cases often collapse in court, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished. To address such gaps, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs has outlined targeted strategies under Nigeria's National Gender Policy to strengthen GBV response systems across the country.

Kurian et al. (2024) highlight that an effective response to gender-based violence (GBV) must begin with ensuring that survivors receive comprehensive support services, including medical care, psychosocial assistance, and legal aid. They emphasize the importance of creating a safe and

respectful environment that preserves the dignity of all individuals—women, men, girls, and boys—affected by GBV. Building on this perspective, Guaita-Fernández et al. (2024) argue that a critical component of reducing GBV lies in strengthening the legal systems through reforms that protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable. They also stress the need for public education to raise awareness about the harmful consequences of GBV. Capasso et al. (2022) add that deterrence through punishment, coupled with well-structured response mechanisms, is essential for an effective policy framework. According to these experts, an integrated approach involving prevention, legal enforcement, and survivor support is key to addressing the persistent issue of GBV in society.

Key policy objectives focus on the comprehensive implementation of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in every Nigerian state, aiming to create a unified legal framework against gender-based violence (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). To strengthen deterrence, the policy calls for the introduction of harsher penalties and sanctions for offenders. Building the capacity of law enforcement agencies is also a priority, enabling more effective investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases. Furthermore, the establishment of efficient database management systems is essential for accurately documenting and tracking victims and incidents. Upgrading forensic infrastructure will improve the collection and use of evidence in legal processes, while the creation of a sexual offenders registry is intended to monitor repeat offenders and prevent further crimes. Darjee and Russell (2012) highlight the importance of regularly reviewing and updating SGBV laws to close legislative gaps and ensure ongoing protection for victims within the justice system.

To achieve these policy goals, Anguzu et al. (2023) and Upadhyay et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of continuous sensitization campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma faced by survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These campaigns help create a more supportive environment where victims feel safe to come forward and seek help. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (2021) highlights the crucial role of advocacy targeted at traditional and community leaders, who often hold significant influence in shaping social attitudes and behaviors. Securing adequate funding for essential victim support services, including medical, legal, and psychosocial care, is another vital component to ensure comprehensive assistance for survivors. Furthermore, fostering strong networks and partnerships among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development agencies, and other stakeholders is essential to coordinate efforts and maximize the impact of interventions. Together, these strategies contribute to a holistic and sustainable approach to combating GBV in Nigeria.

## 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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