

Gender-based crimes against women in Katsina State, Nigeria: Patterns, determinants, and institutional responses

Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari^{1*}, Muhammad Tasiu Dansabo²,
Auwal Ibrahim Abubakar³, Alma Vorfi Lama

^{1&3}Al-Qalam University Katsina, Nigeria

²Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Nigeria

⁴University of Business and Technology, Kosovo, Serbia

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Abstract

Gender-based crimes against women in Katsina State occur at alarming levels and are systemically entrenched amid armed conflict. Extreme poverty, patriarchal norms, and weak legal protection create spaces of impunity for perpetrators, while inadequate institutional responses exacerbate women's vulnerability and silence survivors. The aim of this study is to examine the structural factors underlying violence, the dominant forms of violence, and the implementation gaps in gender-based violence (GBV) protection policies in Katsina State, Nigeria. This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with in-depth interviews conducted with 14 survivors and key informant interviews. The data were thematically analyzed using source triangulation, member checking, and reflexivity to ensure validity. Three key findings: (1) structural factors: poverty, economic inequality, internal displacement, patriarchal norms, with most vulnerable groups; (2) dominant violence: rape, survival-based sexual exploitation, economic neglect by husbands, forced marriage, physical and psychological violence; (3) government adopted Child Rights Act, VAPP Act, GBV centers, but implementation constrained by weak law enforcement, poor coordination, limited rural access, cultural norms sustaining impunity. This study concludes violence against women in Katsina State is driven by poverty, patriarchy, and displacement, dominated by rape, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage, while weak policies and impunity sustain it. This study contributes by strengthening structural feminist and intersectionality perspectives, and proposes an ecosystem model that simultaneously addresses economic neglect, cultural norms, and the roles of religious leaders.

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



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*Corresponding author: Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari, Department of Sociology, Al-Qalam University Katsina-Nigeria, email: kariyoma2@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals on the basis of their gender, rooted in systemic power inequalities (Tan & Kuschminder, 2022). In Nigeria, GBV disproportionately affects women, children, and the elderly, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Northern Nigeria (Quadri et al., 2024). Vulnerability increases when male breadwinners die or are absent, creating economic pressure on households, which is further exacerbated by the growing population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in urban areas (Gonalons-Pons & Gangl, 2021). In crisis contexts, some women of reproductive age are compelled to engage in transactional sex to meet basic needs (Barbosa et al., 2023). GBV encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological violence, including threats and restrictions on freedom of movement (Mangubhai et al., 2023). Thus, GBV consistently reflects structural gender inequality, which is intensified by conflict, poverty, and family disintegration (Mangubhai et al., 2023; Gonalons-Pons & Gangl, 2021).

Based on the existing literature on gender-based violence (GBV), the findings can be grouped into three main themes that more comprehensively explain the dynamics of GBV. First, armed conflict and gender inequality, along with unequal power relations, are key factors contributing to the increase in GBV cases (Tewabe et al., 2024; Nagarajan, 2024; Ekhtor-Mobayode et al., 2022). Second, gaps in the implementation of international and national legal frameworks persist due to cultural resistance to gender equality, particularly in conservative regions (Obradovic, 2015; Hefez et al., 2024; Enemo, 2021; Mshelia, 2021). Third, the local reality in Katsina highlights violence driven by poverty, patriarchal norms, and child marriage (REACH, 2022; Ozaki & Otis, 2016; Mellar et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2015). Thus, previous studies have not sufficiently addressed exploitation resulting from the economic neglect of husbands and the role of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The novelty of this study lies in mapping these dynamics as forms of active violence and demonstrating the implementation gap of policies in Northern Nigeria.

In response to these gaps, this study examines the structural factors underlying violence, the dominant forms of violence, and the implementation gaps in GBV protection policies in Katsina State, Nigeria. Specifically, this research addresses three questions: (1) What structural factors drive violence against women in Katsina, and why are refugee women and children under the age of 18 the most vulnerable? (2) How do dominant forms of violence such as rape, sexual exploitation, economic neglect by husbands, and forced marriage occur in practice? (3) Why is the implementation of policies (the Child Rights Act, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act [VAPP], and GBV response centres) hindered by weak law enforcement, poor coordination, limited access, and cultural impunity? This study contributes theoretically by extending structural violence theory through the identification of husbands' economic neglect and age-based vulnerability as new determinants of GBV in conflict-affected settings. In practical terms, it highlights the need for cross-institutional coordination reform and the expansion of GBV service access to rural areas in Northern Nigeria.

This study argues that gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina State is not an individual phenomenon but a systemic product of five structural factors: patriarchal cultural norms, extreme poverty, husbands' economic neglect, internal displacement, and age vulnerability (under 30 years). Data show that GBV cases such as rape by known perpetrators are prevalent, while survival sex and forced marriage dominate. Although the government has adopted the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, and established GBV response centers, implementation remains constrained by weak law enforcement, poor inter-agency coordination, limited rural service access, and persistent

cultural norms perpetuating impunity. Consequently, legal interventions that fail to address economic conditions, norm transformation, and specific protections for displaced persons and young people are unlikely to break the cycle of violence.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study aims to analyze the patterns, structural causes, and institutional responses to gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina State, a conflict-affected area. To achieve this, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed, a qualitative approach emphasizing in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences in sensitive contexts. Smith and Osborn (2015) note that IPA focuses on how individuals make sense of their life experiences, both socially and emotionally. This approach is particularly relevant for examining how GBV survivors navigate trauma, stigma, and recovery processes in Katsina. Hartman and Squires (2024) emphasize that IPA facilitates deep reflection and amplifies survivors' voices, especially in regions with low reporting rates, while safeguarding participants' safety and agency.

Sampling and Participants

This study employed purposive sampling, in line with the principles of naturalistic research, which emphasize depth of exploration over broad generalization. Campbell et al. (2020) note that purposive sampling is effective for obtaining direct insights from individuals with relevant experiences. A total of 14 GBV survivors were selected in collaboration with the GBV Center in Katsina State, including both registered participants and those actively engaged in support programs. The inclusion criteria focused on direct experiences of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), without demographic restrictions, allowing for an in-depth analysis of GBV patterns and structural determinants in conflict-affected areas. Sovacool et al. (2018) emphasize that this technique is appropriate when ethical considerations and access are critical factors. Participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to engage in reflective dialogue, ensuring that the data obtained were both relevant and meaningful.

Data Collection

Data were collected through In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with survivors and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with GBV center staff. A total of 14 interviews were conducted between 7 August and 10 September 2024 in Hausa to ensure cultural sensitivity and participant comfort. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English. IDIs allowed participants to safely recount their experiences, while KIIs provided systemic context regarding support, challenges, and trends, supporting analysis of GBV patterns, structural causes, and institutional responses. Semi-structured instruments ensured flexibility while maintaining focus on key themes, including GBV types, coping mechanisms, and institutional responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a matrix table aligning participant responses with research objectives. Thematic analysis identified patterns and divergences in narratives while preserving each participant's unique perspective. Triangulation between IDIs and KIIs strengthened data credibility in explaining structural and institutional GBV dynamics in the conflict-affected area. An audit trail documented decision-making throughout the analysis process, ensuring transparency.

Data Validity

Data validity was ensured through multiple strategies. Source triangulation between survivor interviews and key informants verified information consistency. Member checking involved participants reviewing summaries of findings to ensure researchers' interpretations reflected their experiences. Peer debriefing with colleagues minimized subjective bias. Reflexivity was applied by noting potential influences of the researchers' perspective on data interpretation. These strategies align with IPA principles and qualitative research standards to enhance credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Ethical Considerations

The study guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. Names and identifying information were removed from transcripts. Participants received full information about the study objectives and were interviewed only with voluntary consent. Given the sensitivity of GBV and security concerns in Katsina, additional measures were taken to mitigate psychological and social risks. The study received approval from an Ethics Committee and provided counseling referrals to participants when needed.

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, comprising 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 rich qualitative insights into participants' experiences and the broader social context of GBV.

Figure 1

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

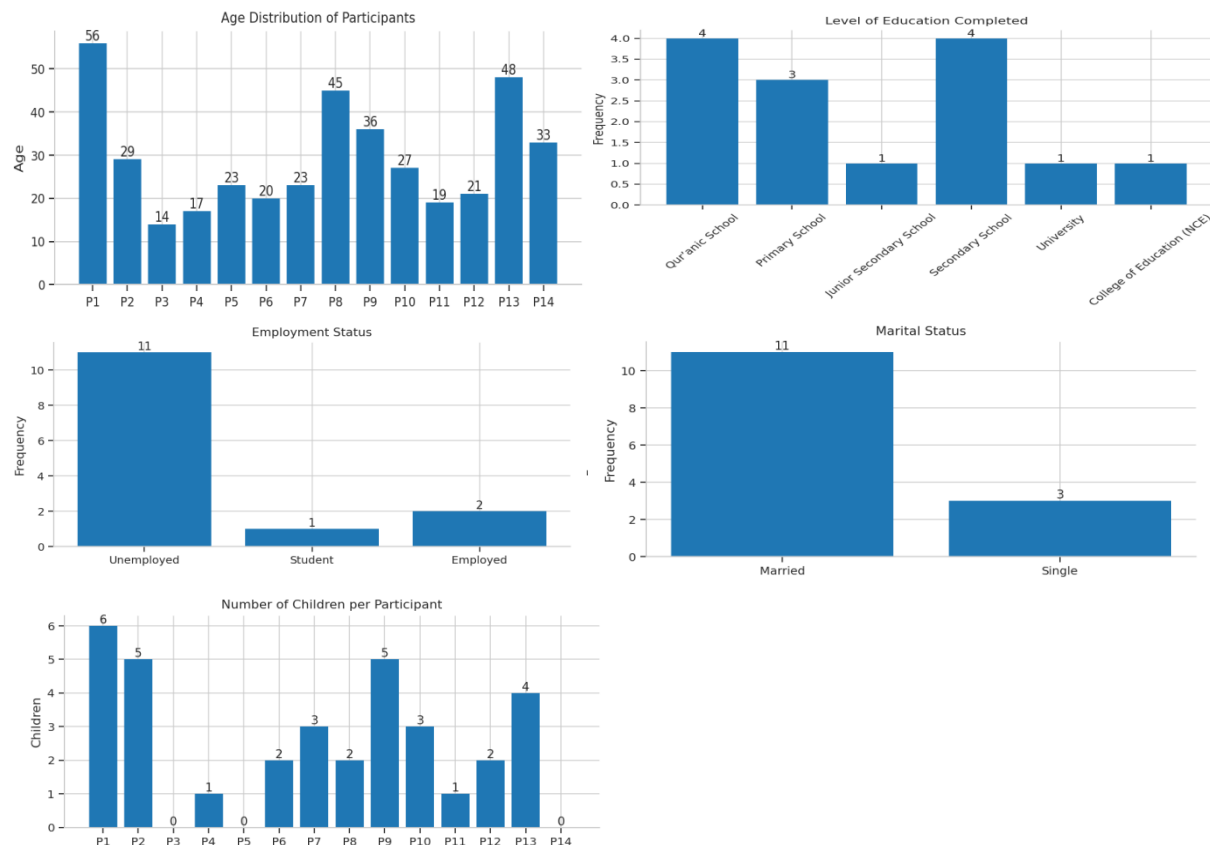


Figure 1 shows that the study participants represent a relatively wide age range, from adolescents (14 years old) to older adults (56 years old). Their educational attainment is generally low, with most having completed Qur'anic School, Primary School, or Secondary School. Only two participants had attained higher education, namely College of Education (NCE) and university level. In terms of employment status, the majority of participants are unemployed, except for two who are employed and one who is still a student. Regarding marital status, almost all participants are married, while the remainder are single. The number of children varies among participants, ranging from those with no children, to those with one or two children, and up to a maximum of six children.

Based on the findings, the 14 participants are predominantly in a vulnerable socio-economic condition. Their educational attainment is generally low (primary, secondary, or Qur'anic), with only two having higher education (degree and NCE). Unemployment is high (12/14 not working); the two employed have higher education. Most participants are of productive age but economically inactive. Regarding marital status, 11 are married, with up to six children and an average of three per married household. Two are single (aged 14 and 33), while one 17-year-old has a child despite being unmarried. Overall, these data illustrate a population characterized by low education, high unemployment, and large household dependency burdens. Such conditions potentially constrain social mobility and economic well-being.

Causes of gender-based violence in Katsina State

The causes of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Katsina State are complex and interconnected. This phenomenon is rooted in entrenched cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality, economic hardship that heightens vulnerability, and limited access to education and legal protection. Additionally, insecurity and the presence of armed groups exacerbate the situation, increasing the susceptibility of women and girls to violence. These factors interact to sustain and perpetuate GBV in the region.

Table 1

Structural Factors Driving Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Katsina State

No.	Structural Factor	Analytical Description	Implications for GBV Vulnerability
1	Cultural Norms	Practices of forced marriage justified through religious or traditional interpretations; denial of material support by parents, husbands, or guardians.	Reinforcing patriarchal control, limiting women's autonomy, and increasing risk of sexual exploitation.
2	Poverty	Severe household food insecurity driving begging, transactional sex, and exposure to human trafficking networks.	Economic deprivation increasing risk of survival-based sexual exploitation.
3	Resource Neglect	Husbands refusing to provide housing, food, and healthcare for wives and children.	Leading to economic neglect, homelessness, and heightened vulnerability to sexual violence.
4	Internal Displacement (IDPs)	Migration due to conflict to urban areas; exploitation of women and girls through sex in exchange for aid.	Displacement which weakens protection systems and increases risk of rape and survival prostitution.
5	Age Vulnerability	Women and girls under 30 are most affected by violence against women and girls (VAWG).	Increasing exposure to forced marriage, sexual violence, and economic exploitation.

Source: This table is compiled based on findings from field surveys and in-depth interviews (IDI and KII) conducted between August and September 2024 in Katsina State

Table 1 identifies five key structural factors contributing to GBV in Katsina State. First, cultural norms that legitimise forced marriage and patriarchal control. Second, extreme poverty, which compels women to engage in transactional sex and begging. Third, resource neglect, particularly husbands who fail to provide financial support for their wives and children, thereby increasing economic vulnerability and exposure to violence. Fourth, internal displacement due to conflict, where female refugees are sexually exploited in exchange for access to assistance. Fifth, age-related vulnerability, whereby women under the age of 30 are at higher risk of sexual violence, forced marriage, and economic exploitation.

Based on the findings, structural factors form a circular and mutually reinforcing vulnerability system. Cultural norms serve as the ideological foundation that legitimizes patriarchal control and forced marriage, while poverty and resource neglect create material conditions that compel women to accept exploitation as a survival strategy. Internal displacement exacerbates the situation by dismantling both formal and informal protection systems, rendering women in refugee camps systematic targets of sexual predation. The most critical dimension is the age of women under 30, who are situated at the intersection of biological and social vulnerability. Interventions that are solely legal in nature, without addressing economic, cultural, and displacement-related protection aspects, are bound to fail. An ecosystem approach is required one that directly tackles poverty, transforms patriarchal norms, and provides specific protection mechanisms for young women and refugee populations.

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

The patterns and prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in Katsina State indicate a concerning and persistent issue affecting women and girls across the region. Various forms of violence, including physical abuse, sexual harassment, and forced marriage, are widespread and often exacerbated by cultural norms, poverty, and insecurity. The increasing frequency of armed attacks and displacement further amplifies survivors' vulnerability, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions and comprehensive, sustainable support systems.

Table 2

Gender-Based Violence Types, Manifestations, and Structural Dimensions in Katsina

Data Source	GBV Categories	Form / Description	Key Characteristics	Structural Dimensions
KII (Key Informant Interview)	Sexual Violence	Approximately 60% of reported GBV cases involve rape	Often perpetrated by someone known to the victim; occurs in private settings or institutions	Gender power imbalance; weak protection system
KII	Survival-Based Exploitation	Food exchange for money among internally displaced persons (IDPs)	Survival strategies in the context of displacement	Vulnerability due to conflict; economic deprivation
KII	Economic Neglect / Resource Exploitation	The husband left the family without food, clothing, or shelter	Systematic failure to fulfill the role of breadwinner	Patriarchal norms; economic dependence within the household
IDI (In-depth Interview)	Sexual Violence against Children	A 14-year-old student was raped twice by a school guard (2023–2024)	Abuse of authority in the educational environment; perpetrator has been arrested	Failure of institutional protection systems
IDI	Physical	Severe physical violence	The victim engaged in	Domestic violence;

	Violence and Economic Coercion	by the father to force the child to earn money	transactional sex, resulting in teenage pregnancy	economic exploitation
IDI	Forced Marriage and Sexual Exploitation	Forced into marriage, ran away, and became a commercial sex worker	Long-term psychological impact (depression since 2015)	Cultural legitimization of coercive marriage
IDI	Criminal Coercion and Social Exclusion	Husband involved in kidnapping; victim forced to join; family expelled from village	Stigmatization of communities and social exclusion	Crime-based violence; collapse of community protection

Source: Data were obtained from KII and IDI in Katsina State (2024)

Table 2 presents findings from Key Informant Interviews (KII) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) regarding GBV in Katsina State. Based on the KII data, approximately 60% of reported GBV cases involve rape perpetrated by known individuals. In addition, survival-based exploitation occurs among internally displaced persons (IDPs), where food is exchanged for money. Cases of economic neglect, particularly husbands failing to provide financial support, were also documented. From the IDI findings, several forms of violence were identified, including sexual abuse of children by school guardians, physical violence and economic coercion by fathers, forced marriage that leads to involvement in sex work, and criminal coercion linked to husbands involved in kidnapping activities, which in turn results in the expulsion of families from their villages.

Based on the findings, GBV in Katsina is not merely an individual act of violence, but a multidimensional phenomenon that is structurally embedded within the social system. The dominance of sexual violence (60% of cases), with perpetrators being known to the victims, indicates weak protection systems and high levels of impunity. Survival-based exploitation among IDPs demonstrates how conflict and poverty force women to exchange their bodies for basic necessities. Most concerning is the occurrence of violence against children within educational settings, highlighting the failure of schools as safe institutional spaces. Cases of forced marriage leading to involvement in sex work, as well as criminal coercion linked to kidnapping activities, further illustrate how patriarchal norms, criminality, and community stigmatisation intersect to create a persistent cycle of violence that is difficult to break. These findings imply that child protection interventions, strengthened educational institutions, and long-term psychosocial rehabilitation are urgently required.

Protection services for the victims of gender-based violence

Based on the research findings, protection services and gender-based violence (GBV) policies play a crucial role in safeguarding the rights, dignity, and well-being of survivors. These policy 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 and comprehensive response. In areas with high GBV prevalence, such services are essential to promote recovery, empowerment, and the reintegration of survivors into the social fabric of the community.

Table 3

Protection Service for the Victims/GBV Policy

Level of Intervention	Actor / Institution	Service Form / Policy	Primary Function	Implementation Challenges
Government	Sexual Assault and	Mental health	Crisis response	Limited resources

	Referral Centre (SARC)	support and safe shelter	and psychosocial recovery	and reach
	Ministry of Women's Empowerment (Technical Working Group, Steering Committee, Surveillance Team)	Policy coordination, reporting, and case handling	Integration of GBV response and monitoring	Inter-agency coordination is not yet optimal
	Legislation (Child Rights Act and agreements on the protection of women)	Legal framework for the protection of women and children	Legal legitimacy and prevention	Law enforcement and low conviction rates
Community	Religious and community leaders	Education, social supervision, and encouragement of family responsibility	Prevention based on social norms	Patriarchal norms are still dominant
	Social support for survivors	Reducing stigma against unmarried mothers	Social reintegration	Residual discrimination still exists
Individual / Household	Parents / guardians	Child supervision and prevention of sexual violence	Preventive protection	Low awareness and literacy of protection
Individual / Country	GBV center and media (radio, hotline)	Basic necessities assistance, vocational training, awareness campaigns	Economic empowerment and access to reporting	Limited access in rural areas

Source: The data was compiled based on the results of field surveys and key informant interviews (KII) and in-depth interviews (IDI) in Katsina State, 2024

Table 3 shows that GBV victim protection interventions operate at three levels. At the government level, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) provide mental health support and safe shelter. The Ministry of Women's Affairs implements technical working groups, steering committees, and monitoring teams to ensure policy coordination, while legislation such as the Child Rights Act provides the legal framework for protection. At the community level, religious leaders and community members play a role in education and social monitoring, as well as providing social support to reduce stigma. At the individual/household level, parents are responsible for supervising and protecting children. Finally, GBV centres and the media contribute by providing basic assistance, vocational training, and awareness-raising campaigns.

The findings reveal a significant gap between policy frameworks and their implementation on the ground. Although the government has established institutions such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and technical coordination mechanisms, the main challenges include limited resources, uneven service coverage, suboptimal inter-agency coordination, and weak law enforcement. At the community level, although religious leaders have strong potential for norm-based prevention, the dominance of patriarchal values remains a structural barrier. Social support for survivors is still affected by residual discrimination and stigma. The most critical gap is observed at the household level, where parental awareness and protection literacy are low, while access to services in rural areas remains highly limited. This indicates that the GBV protection system in Katsina is still largely reactive rather than preventive, and not yet geographically inclusive.

Discussion

This study concludes that violence against women in Katsina State is shaped by three key dimensions. First, the structural drivers of violence include poverty, economic inequality,

internal displacement, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, with refugee women and girls under the age of 18 identified as the most vulnerable groups. Second, the dominant forms of violence include rape, survival-based sexual exploitation, economic neglect by husbands, forced marriage, as well as physical and psychological violence. Third, although the government has adopted the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), and has established GBV response centres, implementation remains hindered by weak law enforcement, poor coordination, limited access in rural areas, and cultural norms that perpetuate impunity. Thus, violence against women in Katsina is driven by structural factors and manifested in dominant forms of abuse, while also being sustained by weak policy implementation and persistent impunity for perpetrators.

These findings are highly relevant to current global and national situations, where armed conflict and the climate crisis have triggered massive displacement waves, which in turn increase women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. As found in Katsina, internally displaced persons (IDPs) often lack access to adequate shelters, forcing them to trade sex for basic assistance (Ekezie, 2022; Baynesagn & Tolla, 2022; Van Daalen et al., 2022). In Nigeria itself, although legal frameworks such as the Child Rights Act and VAPP exist, implementation remains uneven, particularly in the conservative northern region (Ikuteyijo et al., 2024). Support from international organizations such as Safe Children and UNICEF (2022) has been helpful, but has yet to reach isolated rural areas (Sherchan et al., 2017; Pérez-Escamilla et al., 2016). This issue also resonates in other developing countries, where poverty and patriarchal norms collectively perpetuate cycles of violence (Muhwezi et al., 2011; Lugova et al., 2020; Okafor et al., 2023; Lwamba et al., 2022).

Theoretically, these findings confirm radical and structural feminist perspectives that violence against women is not an individual aberration but a product of institutionalized power imbalances (Tong, 2001; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021; Willey-Sthapit et al., 2023; DeGue et al., 2023). The researchers interpret that poverty and displacement in Katsina function as systemic pressure mechanisms that narrow women's choices, rendering transactional sex a "choice without choice." This aligns with the concept of structural violence (Fotaki & Pullen, 2023; McAlpine et al., 2016; Mensah, 2024). Furthermore, using an intersectionality lens, layered identities such as gender, displacement status, young age, and poverty create a "double oppression system" that exponentially increases GBV risk (Bastia et al., 2022; Nartey, 2023). Girls under 18 years, as documented in Katsina, are at the most vulnerable intersection due to the combination of social injustice, limited education, and weak legal protection (Starke et al., 2024; Padavic et al., 2019).

This research provides an understanding that GBV should not be approached reductively. Legal interventions alone will never be adequate as long as the economic and cultural root causes remain unaddressed. An important lesson learned is the need to view violence as an ecosystem: husbands' economic neglect (Hutson, 2001), exploitation by parents or moneylenders (Fonjong & Gyapong, 2021; Atuoye et al., 2021; Alabi, 2024; Ojeleke, 2024), and Hausa cultural norms emphasizing family confidentiality and women's complete dependence on men (Schildkrout, 2002) all of these are intertwined. Formal support systems such as GBV centers can function optimally only if supported by norm transformation at the community level, because without that, reporting remains low and justice is difficult to enforce (Bachman, 1998; Ruback & Ménard, 2001; Iloka & Eze, 2022). Thus, the courage to break the silence and engage religious and traditional leaders becomes key.

Previous studies have highlighted that poverty and conflict are major drivers of GBV in developing countries (Njoku & Akintayo, 2021), and have emphasized the importance of

economic support (Hutson, 2001; McAlpine et al., 2016) as well as integrated policy approaches (Kurian et al., 2024; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018). Furthermore, incomplete medical reports are known to hinder prosecution (Clark, 2022; Porcedda, 2023; Michelis et al., 2024), necessitating simultaneous legal and health system reforms (Guaita-Fernández et al., 2024; Capasso et al., 2022; Darjee & Russell, 2012). The present study in Katsina found a predominance of survival-based exploitation and forced marriage, reflecting the specificity of Hausa culture (Schildkrout, 2002). The novelty of this research lies in revealing the specific role of family resource neglect as an intervening variable, whereby the husband's active refusal to provide financial support not merely the absence of resources constitutes a systematized form of violence, distinguishing this study from other conflict-zone research that focuses more on direct physical violence.

Based on the research findings, several concrete recommendations are proposed. First, the allocation of specific funds for the expansion of GBV centers to the village level, including mobile service units. Second, mandatory training for law enforcement officers, medical personnel, and teachers on gender-sensitive GBV handling and the preparation of accurate forensic medical reports. Third, mass campaigns via radio and religious gatherings involving Islamic scholars and traditional leaders to oppose child marriage and the neglect of financial support. Fourth, conditional economic empowerment programs for poor families, with the condition that girls remain in school and are not married off. Fifth, the construction of safe temporary shelters for internally displaced women, equipped with long-term trauma counseling. Sixth, a confidential and accessible community-based complaint system with whistleblower protection. All recommendations are integrated into a single multi-stakeholder action plan subject to regular monitoring.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that violence against women in Katsina State is not a random occurrence but a systemic product of poverty, economic inequality, internal displacement, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms. The most vulnerable groups are displaced women and girls under 18 years of age. The dominant forms of violence include rape, survival-based sexual exploitation, economic neglect by husbands, forced marriage, as well as physical and psychological violence. Alarming, although the government has adopted the Child Rights Act and the VAPP Act and has established GBV centers with holistic services, policy implementation constitutes the primary weak point. Low law enforcement, poor inter-agency coordination, limited access in rural areas, and the dominance of cultural norms that hinder reporting and perpetuate perpetrator impunity render the existing legal framework little more than symbolic. Thus, the gap between policy and field reality is the most critical root of the problem.

This study contributes theoretically by reinforcing structural feminist perspectives, demonstrating that violence against women is a manifestation of institutionalized power imbalances, not an individual aberration. Through an intersectionality lens, this research proves how layered identities gender, displacement status, young age, and poverty create a double oppression system that exponentially increases GBV risk. Practically, the main contribution is that legal interventions alone will never be adequate without addressing economic and cultural root causes. This study offers an ecosystem model: economic neglect by husbands, exploitation by parents or moneylenders, and Hausa cultural norms emphasizing family confidentiality and female dependence must be addressed simultaneously. The engagement of religious and traditional leaders in norm transformation is key to success.

This study has several limitations. First, the geographical scope is limited to Katsina State alone, so generalization to other regions of Northern Nigeria must be done cautiously. Second, the number of participants is relatively small (14 individuals), although the study is qualitative in depth. Third, this research primarily explores the perspectives of victims and GBV center staff, but lacks the viewpoints of perpetrators or community leaders who uphold patriarchal norms. Recommended directions for further research include comparative studies across Nigerian states to examine variations in policy effectiveness, large-scale quantitative research to measure prevalence, and participatory action studies involving communities in designing culturally based interventions. Furthermore, research on the long-term impact of economic empowerment programs on reducing child marriage rates is also urgently needed.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Writing Original Draft. **Muhammad Tasiu Dansabo:** Conceptualization; Investigation; Methodology. **Auwal Ibrahim Abubakar:** Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Validation. **Alma Vorfi Lama:** Supervision; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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