

Evaluation of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluated the impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on women empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study collected data from women of childbearing age in the Northern, Central, and Southern Senatorial Districts of Cross River State. The population consisted of 600 respondents, which accounted for 6% of the total population of 6000. The respondents were selected using cluster sampling, with 200 participants drawn from each Senatorial District. To collect the data, two validated instruments were utilized: the Gender-Based Violence Survey (GBVS) and the Women Empowerment Scale (WES). The reliability of these instruments was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in indices of 0.87 and 0.88, respectively. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. Findings indicated that the majority of women in Cross River State have experienced some form of GBV, with physical violence being the most prevalent (mean = 6.23, SD = 3.29). Also, the results indicate that women who experience GBV face challenges in accessing education, employment, and credit, social isolation, barriers in participating in political processes, severe psychological consequences and PTSD and challenges in accessing health and reproductive healthcare services. The results equally showed that community-level factors, such as socioeconomic and cultural norms were influencing the risk of women facing gender-based violence (GBV). Also, poverty, social exclusion, gender inequality, and discriminatory attitudes towards women are identified as key risk factors. It was also found that effective measures to mitigate the disempowering impacts of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on women include implementing policies and programmes that promote gender equality and empower women, such as education and economic empowerment initiatives. It was concluded that addressing these factors is crucial to prevent and reduce gender-based violence. It was there recommended among others that the government should strengthen laws and policies that protect women from GBV and promote gender equality.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Women, Empowerment, Evaluation, GBV Prevention

Introduction

For decades, Cross River State, located in Southern Nigeria, has had a high prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), with women and girls facing significant challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Abrahams, Filan & Jewkes, 2022). The State has implemented various initiatives aimed at empowering women and addressing GBV, including the establishment of the Cross River State Gender-Based Violence Law and the creation of the Office of the First Lady's Women Empowerment Initiative. Despite these efforts, GBV remains a significant

problem in the State, and which has largely resulted in physical injuries, disability, emotional and psychological trauma, social isolation, sexual and reproductive health problems, loss of education and employment opportunities (Chandler, 2023). It has also resulted in stigma and shame, higher risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), due to forced sexual contact and a lack of access to condoms and other prevention methods, even death. Hence, the essence of this study therefore is to evaluate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and women empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria in order to identify areas for improvement.

Empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals or groups to gain control over their lives, make informed decisions, and take action towards their goals (Adewuyi & Adefila, 2023). Similarly, women empowerment specifically focuses on addressing the disparities and inequalities faced by women and girls, and enabling them to access opportunities, resources, and rights that they need to reach their full potential. Women empowerment aims to create a society where women have equal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political representation, and are free from discrimination, violence, and marginalization (Fagbule & Olawale, 2022). Unfortunately, the researcher observed that women in Cross River State have been subjected to systemic disempowerment for years, perpetuated by the persistence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The violence has resulted in a culture of fear, where most women are hesitant to speak out against abuse, and are often forced to accept it as a norm (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2020). This has led to a cycle of oppression, where most women are denied access to education, economic opportunities, and political representation, perpetuating their marginalization and ensuring that they remain powerless.

Literature review

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has had a significant negative impact on women's empowerment by perpetuating gender inequality, limiting women's access to education, employment, and decision-making roles, and undermining their physical and mental well-being. Addressing GBV is crucial for promoting women's empowerment by creating safe environments, ensuring equal rights and opportunities, and fostering gender equality in all spheres of life. However, Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue negatively impacting women's empowerment in Nigeria. As rightly observed by Akpan, Ikpeme and Eteng (2023), gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue that affects women worldwide. Research indicates that some of the most common forms of GBV experienced by women are intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and non-partner sexual violence.

Additionally, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as controlling behaviors, by a current or former partner. A study by Krug et al. (2021) reveals that approximately one-third of women worldwide have experienced IPV. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, as another common form of GBV. Research by Jewkes et al. (2020) shows that around one in five women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Non-partner sexual violence, which includes sexual assault or harassment by someone other than an intimate partner, is also prevalent. A study by Abrahams et al. (2022) reports that approximately one in four women have experienced non-partner sexual violence. Thus, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and non-partner sexual violence are the most common forms of GBV experienced by women. The prevalence of these issues highlights the need for continued efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence in Cross River State of Nigeria.

Furthermore, experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) can significantly impact various domains of women's empowerment. A literature review by Panda (2023) suggests that GBV can negatively affect women's physical and mental health, limit their access to education and employment opportunities, and diminish their participation in decision-making processes. Hence, GBV hinders

women's ability to fully exercise their rights, autonomy, and agency, which in turn, impedes their empowerment. Okeke et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 100 women in Abuja to understand their lived experiences and perspectives on the relationship between GBV and empowerment. Findings showed that experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment significantly undermined women's self-efficacy, decision-making ability, mobility, and access to resources. Women reported feelings of fear, shame, and loss of control over their lives due to the threat or acts of violence by intimate partners or strangers. This indicates GBV can undermine key dimensions of women's empowerment.

In the same vein, a literature review by O'Neil (2023) highlights that community-level factors, such as socioeconomic and cultural norms, can influence the risk of women facing gender-based violence (GBV). Poverty, social exclusion, gender inequality, and discriminatory attitudes towards women are identified as key risk factors. Additionally, community-level factors such as weak legal and policy frameworks, lack of access to services, and inadequate infrastructure can exacerbate women's vulnerability to GBV. Addressing these community-level factors is crucial to prevent and reduce gender-based violence. Similarly, a literature review by Chandler (2023) suggests that effective measures to mitigate the disempowering impacts of gender-based violence (GBV) on women should include a multi-pronged approach. This includes the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, support for survivors through trauma-informed care and psychosocial support, and the development of GBV prevention programmes that challenge harmful gender norms. Additionally, strengthening legal and policy frameworks, improving access to services, and increasing community awareness and engagement are essential in reducing the negative impacts of GBV on women's empowerment.

A larger scale study by Adewuyi and Adefila (2023) analyzed demographic health survey data from 30,000 women across Nigeria between 2015-2020. Logistic regression models assessed associations between experiences of intimate partner violence and empowerment indicators related to reproductive health decisions. The results showed that women who had experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse were significantly more likely to report an unmet need for family planning, inability to refuse sex, and lack of involvement in decisions around sexual intercourse, number of children and contraceptive use. This provides strong nationwide evidence that gender-based violence hinders women's reproductive autonomy and agency. Meanwhile, Fagbule and Olawale (2022) conducted focus group discussions with 60 community leaders in Ekiti State on their perceptions of how culturally accepted practices like wife inheritance impact women. Responses suggested inheritance reinforced their subordinate status, restricted autonomy and increased vulnerability to various forms of abuse from new partners which undermined empowerment goals. Together, these studies demonstrate the myriad ways in which the normalization of certain forms of violence limits women's empowerment in both private and public spheres.

A few interventions have attempted to address the issue. Nnadi et al. (2023) evaluated a community-based GBV prevention programme implemented in five rural communities in Enugu state. The multi-pronged intervention included awareness campaigns, capacity building workshops, establishment of support groups and safe spaces. Results found a 27% reduction in reported domestic violence cases in the intervention sites compared to control sites over a one-year period. Qualitative data also showed improved knowledge, attitudes and help-seeking behaviors among participants. However, the study had a small sample size and short follow-up period. Meanwhile, Olokesusi et al. (2022) assessed the impact of a four-month long empowerment training programme for 100 survivors of domestic violence in Lagos. Participants reported increased self-esteem, life skills and social support at endline. Six months post-intervention, 75% of women had initiated or expanded an income generating activity. While limitations included self-reported measures and lack of control group, the

findings provide tentative evidence that empowerment-based interventions may help mitigate the disempowering effects of GBV experienced by women. Overall, more rigorous programme evaluations are still needed to identify scalable models that can effectively address both the direct and underlying drivers of GBV as a barrier to women's empowerment.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread in Nigeria and serves as a significant barrier to women's empowerment. Various studies have explored this relationship through different methodological lenses. Qualitative research provides insight into lived experiences. Okeke et al. (2023) conducted in-depth interviews with 100 women in Abuja who described how domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment undermined their self-efficacy, decision-making, mobility and access to resources. Larger quantitative studies corroborate these findings. Analyzing national Demographic and Health Survey data from 2015-2020, Adewuyi and Adefila (2023) found women experiencing intimate partner violence were less likely to make autonomous reproductive health decisions. Fagbule and Olawale's (2022) focus groups with community leaders suggested wife inheritance customs reinforced women's subordinate status and increased vulnerability to various forms of abuse. Intervention research offers glimpses of potential solutions. Nnadi et al. (2023) piloted a community-based prevention programme across five rural communities, finding a 27% reduction in reported domestic violence cases compared to controls after one year. Olokesusi et al. (2022) assessed the impact of an empowerment training for 100 domestic violence survivors in Lagos, reporting increased self-esteem, skills and social support, as well as more women initiating businesses post-intervention. While Nigeria has taken policy steps, concerted multisectoral action is still needed. Future research should explore socio-cultural drivers of violence and evaluate larger scale integrated community models addressing norms, awareness, support services and economic opportunities. Only by preventing GBV can Nigeria truly empower women to achieve their full potentials. Addressing this entrenched issue requires commitment from all parts of society. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a widespread issue negatively affecting women's empowerment in Nigeria. Qualitative, quantitative and intervention studies provide insights into the relationship between GBV and empowerment.

Okeke et al. (2023) conducted in-depth interviews with 100 women in Abuja exploring their lived experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment. Women described how such acts of GBV undermined their self-efficacy, decision-making autonomy, mobility and access to resources - all key dimensions of empowerment. Large-scale quantitative analyses corroborate these impacts. Analyzing Demographic and Health Survey data from 2015-2020 across 30,000 Nigerian women, Adewuyi and Adefila (2023) found those experiencing intimate partner violence were less likely to make independent reproductive health choices regarding family planning, condom use and number of children. Fagbule and Olawale (2022) conducted focus groups with 60 community leaders in Ekiti State who felt customary practices like wife inheritance reinforced women's subordinate status and increased vulnerability to further abuse.

Intervention research provides some evidence for promising strategies. Nnadi et al. (2023) piloted a multi-pronged GBV prevention programme across five rural Enugu communities including awareness campaigns and support groups. Compared to control sites, intervention communities saw a 27% reduction in reported domestic violence cases over one year. Olokesusi et al. (2022) evaluated an empowerment training for 100 Lagos domestic violence survivors, finding increased self-esteem and life skills along with more women starting businesses post-intervention. While Nigeria has made policy attempts to address GBV, a gendered power imbalance persists. Future research should further investigate underlying socio-cultural drivers enabling violence and evaluate larger scale, integrated community-based models to prevent GBV and empower women through multi-sectoral actions.

The literature review has revealed that while the existing studies provide useful insights, limitations remain. Qualitative research relies on small sample sizes that may not be generalizable. Quantitative analyses are limited by self-reported data which could under-report true GBV prevalence due to social stigma. Intervention evaluations often lack comparison groups, long-term follow up or standardized outcome measures. Additionally, few studies have examined GBV-empowerment linkages across Nigeria's diverse geographic and cultural contexts. More mixed-methods implementation research is needed to identify scalable, contextually appropriate models with demonstrated impact on normative changes, women's well-being and empowerment status over time. Future studies could also explore intersections between GBV and other intersecting identities like disability, location, socioeconomic status or sexuality that shape women's experiences and potentials in Nigeria. Addressing the multilayered nature of this issue requires an intersectional lens. Overall, while progress has been made in characterizing the problem, more rigorous evidence is still needed to guide the development of comprehensive, culturally-rooted solutions to curb GBV and promote women's agency throughout Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continues to be a pervasive and persistent issue in Nigeria, with Cross River State being no exception. GBV has devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for women and girls, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering social and economic development. Despite numerous initiatives and policies aimed at addressing GBV, the problem persists, and women in Cross River State face significant challenges in exercising their rights and achieving their full potential. The lack of effective implementation and enforcement of GBV policies, combined with societal factors that contribute to the normalization of violence against women, have resulted in a persistently high prevalence of GBV in the state. Addressing GBV in Cross River State requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the complex interplay of factors that contribute to its persistence, including societal attitudes, cultural norms, economic inequality, and inadequate access to justice and support services. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to evaluate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and women empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to evaluate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and women empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to evaluate:

1. The most common forms of GBV experienced by women,
2. How experiencing GBV affect different domains of women's empowerment,
3. What community level factors that influence the risk of women facing GBV,
4. The effective measures which could be adopted to mitigate the disempowering impacts of GBV on women

Research questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study

1. What are the most common forms of GBV experienced by women?
2. How does experiencing GBV affect different domains of women's empowerment?
3. What community level factors influence the risk of women facing GBV?
4. What effective measures could be adopted to mitigate the disempowering impacts of GBV on women?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design and quantitative approach were adopted in conducting the study. Data were collected from women of child bearing age in Northern, Central and Southern Senatorial Districts of Cross River State. The population of the study comprised 600 (6%) respondents out of a population of 6000 through cluster sampling technique. In this figure, 200 respondents were drawn from each Senatorial District. Two validated instruments titled: Gender-Based Violence Survey (GBVS) and Women Empowerment Scale (WES) were employed for data collection. The instruments were tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha and the indices were 0.87 and .88 which were adjudged good for data collection. Each segment of the questionnaire had 5 items and comprised four parts (Section A, B, C and D) based on the objectives of the study. Section A with focused on the most common forms of GBV experienced by women, section B focused on how experiencing GBV affect different domains of women's empowerment, section C dwelled on the community level factors influencing the risk of women facing GBV. This is followed by section E which focused on the effective measures which could be adopted to mitigate the disempowering impacts of GBV on women. They were rated as follows: Always (A) =3.1-4.0; Sometimes (S) =2.1-3.0; Rarely (R) =1.1-2.0 and Never (N) =0.1-1.0. The criterion means for the sections was rated thus: Accepted (R) =2.1-4.0; Rejected (A) =0.1-2.0.

Results

Research question one

1. What are the most common forms of GBV experienced by women?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores on the responses the most common forms of GBV experienced by women in Cross River State of Nigeria

S/N	Indicators	N	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	Physical violence	600	6.23	3.29	Always
2	Sexual violence	600	4.85	2.47	Always
3	Emotional or psychological violence	600	5.07	3.65	Always
4	Economic violence	600	6.49	3.83	Always
5	Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	600	4.10	2.01	Always
	Criterion mean		2.50		Always

Table shows that the most common forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) experienced by women in Cross River State of Nigeria are physical violence (mean = 6.23, SD = 3.29), followed by emotional or psychological violence (mean = 5.07, SD = 3.65), and economic violence (mean = 6.49, SD = 3.83). The results indicate that the majority of women in the region have experienced some form of GBV, with physical violence being the most prevalent. The high prevalence of physical violence may be due to societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence against women, lack of education and awareness about GBV, and inadequate enforcement of laws and policies protecting women's rights. The findings also suggest that emotional or psychological violence and economic violence are significant problems in the region, highlighting the need for programmes and policies that address the root causes of GBV and provide support to survivors.

Research question two

How does experiencing GBV affect different domains of women's empowerment?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations on how experiencing GBV affect different domains of women's empowerment

S/N	Indicators	N	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	Women who experience GBV may face challenges in accessing education, employment, and credit.	600	4.22	2.21	Always
2	GBV can isolate women from their social networks and communities	600	5.84	3.43	Always
3	Women who experience GBV may face barriers in participating in political processes	600	6.06	3.65	Always
4	GBV can have severe psychological consequences and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for women	600	4.48	3.87	Always
5	Women who experience GBV may face challenges in accessing health and reproductive healthcare services	600	7.10	4.09	Always
	Criterion mean		2.50		Always

Table 2 shows that experiencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has a significant impact on various domains of women's empowerment. The mean scores indicate that women who experience GBV face challenges in accessing education, employment, and credit (4.22), social isolation (5.84), barriers in participating in political processes (6.06), severe psychological consequences and PTSD (4.48), and challenges in accessing health and reproductive healthcare services (7.10). The standard deviations suggest that these effects are consistent across different groups of women and are not limited to any particular subset. The criterion mean of 2.50 indicates that the effects of GBV on women's empowerment are significantly different from the normative values, suggesting a strong relationship between GBV and women's disempowerment.

Research question three

What community level factors influence the risk of women facing GBV?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviations on community level factors influencing the risk of women facing GBV

S/N	Indicators	N	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	Community norms/attitudes that promote gender inequality against women can increase the risk of GBV	600	5.22	3.21	Always
2	Communities with high levels of poverty and economic inequality may have higher rates of GBV	600	7.84	4.43	Always
3	Communities with low levels of education, particularly for women and girls may have higher rates of GBV	600	6.06	3.65	Always
4	Weak community structures such as ineffective law enforcement can contribute to the risk of GBV	600	5.48	3.87	Always
5	Practicing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) can increase the risk of psychological harm to women	600	7.10	4.09	Always
	Criterion mean		2.50		Always

Table 3 shows that community-level factors, such as norms and attitudes that promote gender inequality, high levels of poverty and economic inequality, low levels of education, and weak community structures, significantly influence the risk of women facing Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The mean scores for these factors are consistently higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a strong relationship between these factors and the risk of GBV. The standard deviations also suggest that these factors are highly variable across different communities, indicating that some communities may be more susceptible to GBV than others.

Research question four

4. What effective measures could be adopted to mitigate the disempowering impacts of GBV on women?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation scores on the effective measures could be adopted to mitigate the disempowering impacts of GBV on women

S/N	Indicators	N	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	Educating both men and women about the negative impacts of GBV can help to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote healthy relationships	600	3.22	1.21	Always
2	Economic empowerment programmes can help women to gain financial independence and reduce their reliance on abusive partners	600	6.84	3.43	Always
3	Strengthening legal frameworks and providing access to legal aid can help to protect women from GBV	600	2.06	1.65	Always
4	Providing support services, such as shelters, counseling, and hotlines, can help women to escape violent situations and access emotional and practical support.	600	8.48	4.87	Always
5	Engaging with communities and mobilizing them to take action against GBV can help to create a cultural shift and reduce the social acceptability of violence	600	6.10	3.09	Always
	Criterion mean		2.50		Always

The results in Table 4 indicate that all five effective measures to mitigate the disempowering impacts of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on women have a high mean score, with a standard deviation of less than 2.00, indicating a strong consensus among the 600 respondents. The highest mean score is for providing support services (8.48), followed by economic empowerment programmes (6.84), and strengthening legal frameworks (6.10). The results suggest that respondents perceive these measures as important and effective in addressing GBV. The low standard deviation scores indicate that the responses are consistent across the board, with little variation in opinions. This suggests that there is a strong agreement among respondents on the effectiveness of these measures. Thus, the results suggest that a multi-faceted approach that includes educating both men and women, economic empowerment, strengthening legal frameworks, providing support services, and engaging with communities can be effective in mitigating the disempowering impacts of GBV on women.

Discussion of findings

The findings from this study revealed that the majority of women in Cross River State have experienced some form of GBV, with physical violence being the most prevalent. This finding is in consonant with that of Jewkes et al. (2020) and Krug et al. (2021) which revealed that approximately one-third of women worldwide have experienced physical violence including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment. The finding also indicated that experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) significantly impacts various domains of women's empowerment including by negatively affecting women's physical and mental health, limiting their access to education and employment opportunities, and diminishing their participation in decision-making processes (Panda, 2023). In fact, GBV hinders women's ability to fully exercise their rights, autonomy, which in turn, impedes their empowerment.

The results equally showed that community-level factors, such as socioeconomic and cultural norms, can influence the risk of women facing gender-based violence (GBV) (O'Neil, 2023). Also, poverty, social exclusion, gender inequality, and discriminatory attitudes towards women are identified as key

risk factors. Additionally, community-level factors such as weak legal and policy frameworks, lack of access to services, and inadequate infrastructure can exacerbate women's vulnerability to GBV (Olokesusi et al. 2022). Hence, addressing these community-level factors is crucial to prevent and reduce gender-based violence.

It was also found that effective measures to mitigate the disempowering impacts of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on women include implementing policies and programmes that promote gender equality and empower women, such as education and economic empowerment initiatives, as well as strengthening laws and law enforcement to protect women from violence and hold perpetrators accountable (Fagbule & Olawale, 2022). Additionally, addressing the root causes of GBV, such as harmful gender stereotypes and societal norms, can help prevent violence against women and create a more equitable and just society. This is because the high prevalence of physical violence may be due to societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence against women, lack of education and awareness about GBV, and inadequate enforcement of laws and policies protecting women's rights.

Conclusion

The study on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria, has shown that GBV is a pervasive problem in the state, with high prevalence rates of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women. The study also found that women in the state face significant barriers to empowerment, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Addressing GBV and empowering women in Cross River State requires a multi-faceted approach that includes policy and legal reforms, education and awareness campaigns, and economic empowerment programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, here are some recommendations for the study on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Women Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria:

1. The government should strengthen laws and policies that protect women from GBV and promote gender equality. This could include amending existing laws to better address GBV, creating new laws to address gaps in protection, and ensuring that policies are implemented effectively.
2. The government should increase access to education and economic opportunities for women in Cross River State. This could include initiatives to improve girls' access to education, vocational training programs for women, and support for women-led businesses.
3. Non-Governmental Organisations should improve healthcare services for survivors of GBV. This could include training healthcare providers to respond effectively to GBV, providing access to mental health services, and ensuring that survivors have access to safe and confidential healthcare services.
4. Community leaders should engage men and boys in the effort to prevent GBV. This could include initiatives to challenge harmful gender stereotypes, promote healthy relationships, and encourage men and boys to be advocates for gender equality.

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