

Violence against Women: Threat to Rural Development in Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigated the impact of violence against women on rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research focused on analysing the impact of domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, human trafficking, and rural development in the Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria. The study used a cross-sectional survey research approach. Data were collected from a sample of 384 respondents using a standardized questionnaire. The data gathered were examined using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. The research results have shown that domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, and human trafficking have a substantial impact on rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Consequently, the research asserts that violence against women has a substantial impact on rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research suggests that NGOs and civil society organizations should carry out awareness campaigns and educational programs in rural regions to alter attitudes and behaviours that tolerate or normalize domestic abuse. These programs should aim to educate both males and females about the legal, social, and health ramifications of domestic abuse and advocate for gender parity.

Keywords: community development, gender, rural, threat, poverty, violence, women, rehabilitation, Nigeria

Introduction

Violence against women is a widespread problem that affects societies across the world, regardless of their national, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds. This issue takes multiple forms, such as physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse (Krook & Sanin, 2019; Anam et al., 2023). Forms of violence against women encompass a range of harmful acts such as violence from an intimate partner, sexual assault by individuals other than a partner, the practice of female genital cutting, exploitation and abuse of a sexual nature, maltreatment of children, the killing of female infants, and the early marriage of girls (Minchella et al, 2021). This violence not only causes immediate harm to the victims but also has long-term consequences on their physical and mental health. It impedes women's ability to participate fully in society and contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality. The problem is deeply rooted in societal norms that devalue women and girls and in systems that fail to protect them effectively (Aguirre et al, 2020). In the past, many societies legally allowed men to use violence as a means of "disciplining" their wives. For example, during Romulus's reign in Rome, wife-beating was accepted and condoned under "The Laws of Chastisement." This legal principle was integrated into conventional English common law, as evidenced by "The Rule of Thumb," which allowed

husbands to physically discipline their wives with a rod or switch provided that its thickness did not surpass the width of the man's thumb at its base. Similarly, most traditional African societies are patriarchal, with women occupying a decidedly subordinate position (Chakraborty & Pal, 2020; Uzoh et al, 2023).

This inequality is institutionalized in African customary law, where women lack inheritance rights from their husbands and are excluded from sharing ownership of marital assets or land (Cepeda, Lacalle-Calderon, & Torralba, 2021). The power imbalance in traditional African marriages is highlighted by the acceptance of polygyny, male promiscuity, the extended family's control over married couples, and the pervasive practice of bride price, which contributes to the widespread abuse of wives (Tullio et al., 2021; Anam et al., 2024). The bride price is often seen as a symbol of a man's power over what he has purchased, granting him exclusive sexual rights over his wife and putting women at a disadvantage. In Asia and the Middle East, women suffer violence and even death in the name of honour. In Africa, girls undergo genital mutilation due to deeply rooted cultural and traditional beliefs passed down through generations. In Western Europe, migrant and refugee women face persecution for resisting the moral and cultural norms of their host communities. In Southern Africa, there is a misguided belief that raping virgins can cure men of HIV/AIDS, leading to the assault and infection of young women (Chhabra et al, 2020; Cobham, & Ntombela, 2010). Despite being in the most affluent and industrialized countries, women continue to face lethal domestic violence from their partners. Violence against women is prevalent in Africa, with Nigeria being one of the countries with a high incidence of such violence. As Agba (2008) notes, discrimination against women is an age-long problem sometimes resulting in violence, stigmatization and denial of some rights in traditional and modern societies and organisations.

In the short term, women from abusive homes may experience significant disruptions in their work lives. They are likely to work fewer hours due to physical injuries, emotional distress, or the need to seek legal or medical assistance. When they are able to work, their productivity may be diminished by ongoing stress, lack of sleep, or the psychological impacts of abuse. In the long run, the pervasive nature of domestic violence can have far-reaching economic consequences (Anam et al, 2024). High levels of domestic violence can deter women from entering the workforce or force them to leave their jobs, resulting in a decrease in the number of women actively contributing to the economy. This reduction in female workforce participation can hinder women's acquisition of skills and education, as they may have less access to professional development opportunities or may be forced to prioritize short-term survival over long-term career goals (Uduji et al, 2019; Uzoh et al, 2023). Furthermore, the societal costs of domestic violence are substantial. As more public resources are diverted to address the immediate needs of survivors, such as health care and judicial services, there is less investment available for other public goods. This can result in lower levels of overall public investment, which can stifle economic growth and development (Archibong et al, 2021; Anam, et al, 2023).

Violence against women in rural areas is a pervasive issue that affects millions of women worldwide. In most rural areas, cultural, social, and economic factors exacerbate the vulnerability of women to various forms of violence (Egbe et al, 2022; Cobham, & Ntombela, 2010). The isolation, limited access to resources, and deeply ingrained traditional norms in many rural communities often create an environment where violence against women is normalized or overlooked (Ndem et al, 2020). In rural areas, women face a range of violent acts, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, forced marriage, dowry-related violence, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (Erete & Odock, 2022). Additionally, in some rural communities, women may be targeted for witchcraft accusations or subjected to violence related to land disputes. The prevalence of violence against women and its adverse physical and mental health effects on victims are well-documented. However, there are limited studies on the prevalence of such violence in rural areas. Existing literature suggests that violence

against women may be as common, if not more so, in rural areas compared to urban populations. Frequently, the focus is on the experiences of urban women and girls, neglecting the significant impact on their rural counterparts, who are often major victims. This study investigates the impact of violence against women on rural development in the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methods

Data and Sampling techniques

The sample size for this study was 384 rural women from the Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. It was determined using Survey Monkey's sample size calculator and a multi-stage sampling technique, which included simple random, purposive, and systematic stratified sampling methods.

Design and Study description

The study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design, a descriptive approach that gathers information on existing phenomena by asking participants about their perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, or values (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Anam et al., 2024; Uzoh et al., 2023). This design was chosen for its efficiency in collecting accurate data at low cost, making it suitable for exploring the characteristics of the population and the relationships between variables. The research focused on the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, a region characterized by its tropical location, diverse ecosystems, and socio-economic significance. Despite its commercial importance, the district is predominantly rural, with over seventy percent of its population residing in villages. The main occupations include farming, trading, artisanal work, and fishing, with small and medium-scale enterprises prevalent among rural residents. These rural entrepreneurs formed a significant sample for the study.

Data collection and Sources of data collection

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to efficiently and cost-effectively collect data on participants' perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and values (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003; Anam et al., 2024; Uzoh et al., 2023). This approach facilitated the examination of the population's characteristics and the relationships between variables. Research was conducted in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, known for its tropical climate, diverse ecosystems, and economic importance. Despite being largely rural with over seventy percent of its population living in villages, the district has a significant commercial role. The primary occupations are farming, trading, artisanal work, and fishing, with a notable presence of small and medium-scale enterprises among rural dwellers, who were a key sample for this study.

Data analysis

The data gathered were meticulously reviewed to confirm that every questionnaire item was answered. The responses were then edited, coded, and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. Demographic responses were displayed in percentages using frequency tables. The analysis included frequency distribution, simple percentages, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis. Each hypothesis was tested separately at a significance level of 0.05.

Results and Discussion

To enhance clarity in data presentation, tables were utilized to display mean scores, standard deviations, percentages, and inferential statistics. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of respondents according to their demographic characteristics. Of the 384 questionnaires

distributed, 375 were correctly completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 97.7%. Table 1 shows the classification of respondents based on their demographic characteristics. The gender classification shows that 218 (58.1%) were females while 157 (41.9%) were males. The classification of age ranged as follows, 62(16.5%) respondents were within the range of 20-27 years, 82(21.9%) were within 28-35 years, 147(39.2%) were within the age bracket of 36-43 years, 37(9.9%) were 44-51 years while 47 (12.5%) of the respondents were 52-59 years. Distribution of respondents based on marital status revealed that 95 (25.3%) were single, 260 (69.3%) were married, 10 (2.7%) were divorced/separated while 10 (2.7%) were widowed. The educational classification of respondents shows that 21 (5.6%) had non-formal education, 32 (8.5%) had First School Leaving Certificate, 215 (57.3%) had Senior Secondary School Certificate while 107 (28.5%) are tertiary. The classification of respondents based on religion shows that 206 (54.9%) are Christian, 23 (0.03%) are Islam, 146 (38.9%) are ATR worshippers.

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Sex		
Female	218	58.1
Male	157	41.9
Total	375	100
Age in years		
18-27 years	62	16.5
28-37 years	82	21.9
38-47 years	147	39.2
48-57 years	37	9.9
58 years and above	47	12.5
Total	375	100
Marital status		
Single	95	25.3
Married	260	69.3
Divorced/Separated	10	2.7
Widowed	10	2.7
Total	375	100
Educational status		
Non-formal education	21	5.6
FSLC	32	8.5
SSCE	215	57.3
Tertiary edu.	107	28.5
Total	375	100
Religion		
Christianity	206	54.9
Islam	23	0.03
ATR	146	38.9
Total	375	100

Fieldwork, 2023

Data analysis

Three hypotheses were formulated in this study. The statistical analysis, including frequency counts, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC), was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between domestic violence and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. In this study, domestic violence is the independent variable, while rural development is the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, with the results presented in Table 2. The statistical analysis in Table 2 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.621 exceeds the critical p-value at a 0.05 level of significance with 373 degrees of freedom. This indicates a significant relationship between domestic violence and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The result also shows an R2 of 0.386, suggesting that domestic violence accounts for 38.6% of the determinants of rural development in the study area.

TABLE 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the relationship between domestic violence and rural development

Variable	N	X	SD	r	p-value
Domestic violence	375	17.76	3.92	0.621	.000
Rural development	375	14.01	3.31		

*Significant at 0.05, df = 373, r-critical=0.139, R² = 0.386.

Source; Field survey, 2023

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between sexual assault & harassment and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. In this study, sexual assault & harassment is the independent variable, while rural development is the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, with the results presented in Table 3. The analysis in Table 3 (r=0.534, p=.000) shows a significant relationship between sexual assault & harassment and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected at a 0.05 level of significance, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The result also shows an R2 of 0.285, indicating that sexual assault & harassment accounts for 28.5% of the determinants of rural development in the study area.

TABLE 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the relationship between sexual assault & harassment and rural development

Variable	N	X	SD	r-cal	p-level
Sexual assault & harassment	375	16.13	4.13	0.534	.000
Rural development	375	14.01	3.31		

*Significant at 0.05, r-critical= 0.139, R² =0.285, df 373.

Source; Field survey, 2023

Hypothesis three

There is no significant relationship between human trafficking and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. In this study, human trafficking is the independent variable, and rural development is the dependent variable. The hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, with results presented in Table 4. The analysis in Table 4 (r=0.576, p=.000) indicates a significant relationship between human trafficking and rural development in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State,

Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected at a 0.05 level of significance, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The result also shows an R² of 0.332, suggesting a significant relationship between human trafficking and rural development in the study area.

TABLE 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the relationship between human trafficking and rural development

Variable level	N	X	—	SD	r-cal	p-
Human trafficking	375	15.66	4.35			
Rural development		375	14.01	3.31	0.576	.000

*Significant at 0.05, r-critical= 0.139, R² =0.332.

Source; Field survey, 2023

Discussion of findings

Domestic violence and rural development

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship domestic violence and rural development in Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria. This implies that domestic violence is a factor that potentially impacts the development of rural areas in this region. The nature of the relationship (positive or negative) and the specific impact on rural development would need to be further explored and detailed in the study. However, generally, a significant relationship suggests that addressing domestic violence could be a critical consideration in efforts to enhance rural development in the area. This finding corresponds with earlier works of Arisukwu et al (2021); Little (2020); Kourti et al, (2020); Piquero et al (2021); Taralekar et al, (2023); Lima (2020). They reported that domestic violence and rural development in terms of healthcare cost, economic productivity and social cohesion. These scholars noted that domestic violence often results in physical and mental health issues, leading to increased healthcare costs for individuals and communities. In rural areas, where healthcare resources may be limited, this can strain the healthcare system and divert resources away from other development initiatives (Arisukwu et al, 2021). Little (2020) assert that victims of domestic violence may suffer from physical injuries and psychological trauma, which can reduce their ability to work and contribute to the local economy. This loss of productivity can hinder economic growth in rural areas. Children who witness or experience domestic violence may suffer from emotional and behavioural issues, affecting their educational performance. This can lead to lower educational attainment in rural communities, limiting future employment opportunities and economic development. Domestic violence can create divisions within communities, eroding social cohesion and trust. This can undermine community-led development initiatives and reduce the effectiveness of collective action for rural development (Kourti et al, 2020).

Sexual assault & harassment and rural development

The findings shows that there is a significant relationship between sexual assault & harassment and rural development in Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria. This suggests that sexual assault and harassment are factors that potentially impact the development of rural areas in the study area. Previous studies shows that victims of sexual assault and harassment, particularly women and girls, may drop out of school or underperform due to trauma, fear of further harassment, or societal stigma. This reduces the educated workforce and limits future economic opportunities. These issues perpetuate gender inequality, which is a significant barrier to sustainable development (Kawuki et al, 2021). The threat or experience of sexual violence can lead individuals or families to migrate from rural areas to seek safety, reducing the population available for local labour and development initiatives (Jones et al, 2023). The psychological

impact of sexual assault and harassment on individuals and communities can lead to a decline in overall well-being, which is a crucial component of sustainable development (Hardt, et al, 2022). The prevalence of sexual assault and harassment can deter both domestic and foreign investment in rural areas. Investors may be hesitant to engage with communities where such issues are rampant, leading to missed opportunities for economic development and infrastructure improvement (DeKeseredy, 2021).

Human trafficking and rural development

The research findings revealed that there is a significant relationship human trafficking and rural development in Cross River State Southern Senatorial District, Nigeria. This implies that the occurrence of human trafficking in the region could negatively influence the development of rural areas. Previous study by Gacinya and Kirimi (2021) reported in their study that human trafficking can undermine the economic stability of rural areas. The loss of productive members of the community, often young and able-bodied individuals, can lead to a decrease in agricultural productivity, labour force, and overall economic output. For Kotiswaran (2019), victims of human trafficking often face physical and mental health issues, which can strain rural healthcare systems. Additionally, the spread of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, can be exacerbated by human trafficking activities. Furthermore, Chaffin et al (2020) observed that human trafficking can disrupt education in rural areas. Children and young adults are often the primary targets of traffickers, leading to increased dropout rates and a lack of skilled workers in the future. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by human trafficking, which can exacerbate gender inequalities in rural areas. This can hinder efforts to promote gender equality and empower women, which are essential components of sustainable rural development (Uduji et al, 2019; Kumar et al, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Violence against women is a widespread problem that significantly impacts rural development. This issue goes beyond individual acts of aggression; it is a systemic problem that undermines the fundamental human rights and dignity of women. In rural areas, where traditional gender roles often prevail, women are particularly vulnerable to various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Such violence not only causes immediate harm to the victims but also has long-term consequences for their mental and physical health, limiting their capacity to lead fulfilling lives. Moreover, violence against women acts as a barrier to their active participation in the economic, social, and cultural spheres of their communities. In rural settings, women play a crucial role in agriculture, household management, and community activities. However, when they are subjected to violence, their ability to engage in these activities is severely compromised. This not only affects their personal development and well-being but also hampers the overall productivity and progress of the community. For instance, women who face domestic violence may be less able to tend to their agricultural duties, participate in community decision-making, or pursue educational opportunities, thereby stifling the potential for economic growth and social cohesion in rural areas. Furthermore, the presence of violence against women perpetuates a cycle of inequality and discrimination, reinforcing patriarchal structures that limit women's opportunities and rights. This undermines efforts to achieve gender equality and empowerment, which are essential components of sustainable rural development.

The study recommends that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations conducting awareness campaigns and educational programs that can help change attitudes and behaviours that condone or normalize domestic violence in rural areas. These programs should aim to educate both men and women about the legal, social, and health consequences of domestic violence and promote gender equality. The government should ensure that there are strong legal frameworks in place to protect victims of domestic violence and hold perpetrators accountable. This includes implementing and enforcing laws related to domestic

violence, as well as providing training for law enforcement and judicial officers to handle such cases effectively. Furthermore, government should establish confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms for victims of sexual assault and harassment. This could include hotlines, online reporting platforms, and designated contact persons in workplaces and educational institutions. Regularly, government should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies, programs, and interventions aimed at preventing and responding to gender violence to ensure they are achieving their intended outcomes.

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Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research (JPAPGR), Vol. 2, No. 1, 2024.
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Omang, Thomas Achoda, Bukie, Fidelis Bukie & Odinka, Godfrey Ekene, 2024, 2 (1):151-160

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