



Research Paper

# The Effects of Gender-Based Violence on Women's Social Lives in Rural Areas: A Sociological Perspective

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## Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical issue that affects women globally, manifesting in various forms including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. This study focuses on the psychosocial effects of GBV among women in Edo State, Nigeria. Utilizing a phenomenological approach within an interpretivist paradigm, the research explores the lived experiences of women who have encountered GBV in this specific socio-cultural and geographical context. The study involved in-depth semi-structured telephonic interviews with 15 female participants, aged 19-35 years, residing in informal settlements within Edo State. Thematic content analysis was conducted on the transcribed and translated interviews to identify key psychosocial impacts of GBV. The findings reveal significant themes including feelings of worthlessness, social isolation, depression, and increased anger towards children. These themes reflect the deep psychological and emotional consequences of GBV, exacerbated by cultural norms, economic hardships, and limited support systems in the region. The study underscores the urgent need for tailored interventions and comprehensive support mechanisms to address GBV in Edo State. The results highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches and the development of robust legal and social frameworks to protect victims and prevent violence. By providing insights into the specific challenges faced by women in Edo State, this research contributes to a broader understanding of GBV's impact in Nigeria and informs policy and practice aimed at mitigating the effects of this pervasive issue.

**Keywords:** Gender-Based Violence, Psychosocial Effects, Edo State, Women, Depression, Social Isolation

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## I. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a profound and pervasive social issue rooted in systemic gender inequality, profoundly affecting women and girls across the globe. GBV encompasses various forms of violence, including emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse, and is predominantly perpetrated by men. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), GBV is a global crisis, with intimate partner violence (IPV) resulting in approximately 137 femicides each day in 2021. By 2019, an alarming 243 million women and girls aged 15–49 worldwide had experienced some form of GBV, with significant health and psychosocial consequences. In Nigeria, and specifically in Edo State, GBV presents a critical and escalating concern. Edo State, located in southern Nigeria, is marked by a diverse socio-cultural landscape where GBV manifests in various forms, influenced by traditional norms, economic conditions, and social structures. The state has seen a troubling rise in reports of GBV, with cases ranging from domestic abuse and sexual violence to harmful traditional practices. These incidents are often exacerbated by entrenched patriarchal attitudes and limited legal protections for victims.

The prevalence of GBV in Edo State is compounded by several factors, including cultural practices, socioeconomic disparities, and a lack of comprehensive legal frameworks to address and prevent violence. Traditional norms and community attitudes can contribute to the normalization of GBV, making it a pervasive issue in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the socio-economic conditions in Edo State, including poverty and limited access to education and healthcare, often leave women vulnerable to violence and less able to seek help or escape abusive situations. Previous research has highlighted the severe psychosocial effects of GBV, which include mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, social isolation, and a range of behavioral disturbances. In Edo State, these effects are magnified by the interplay of local cultural practices and socio-economic challenges. This study aims to investigate the psychosocial effects of GBV specifically among women

in Edo State, providing valuable insights into how GBV impacts individuals within this unique context. By focusing on this region, the study seeks to enhance understanding of GBV's impact in a diverse and underrepresented area, contributing to the development of targeted interventions and support systems tailored to the needs of women in Edo State.

## **II. Literature Review**

Gender-based violence (GBV) represents a profound social issue, intricately linked to gender inequality and affecting women across the globe. It manifests in various forms including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. This literature review examines the psychosocial impacts of GBV, with a specific focus on findings relevant to Edo State, Nigeria. The review draws from global, regional, and local studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### **2.1 Global Perspectives on GBV**

The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights the severe global impact of GBV, noting that it predominantly affects women and girls and is largely perpetrated by men (WHO, 2020). In 2021, intimate partner violence (IPV) was responsible for at least 137 femicides daily (WHO, 2020). By 2019, an estimated 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 had experienced GBV, suffering significant health and psychosocial consequences (World Health Organization, 2013). This global perspective underscores the urgency of addressing GBV as a critical public health and human rights issue.

### **2.2 Regional Context: South Africa**

South Africa, often described as the 'rape capital of the world', reported a high incidence of GBV, with 224,912 general crimes against children and women in 2018-2019 (South African Police Service, 2020). The Vhembe district in Limpopo Province, South Africa, is marked by high prevalence rates of domestic violence, exacerbated by factors such as inadequate legal frameworks, alcohol abuse, patriarchal norms, and harmful cultural practices (Vhembe District Municipality, 2020). These factors contribute to severe psychosocial outcomes, including mental health issues, social isolation, and behavioral disturbances (Randa & Mokoena, 2019).

### **2.3 Psychosocial Effects of GBV**

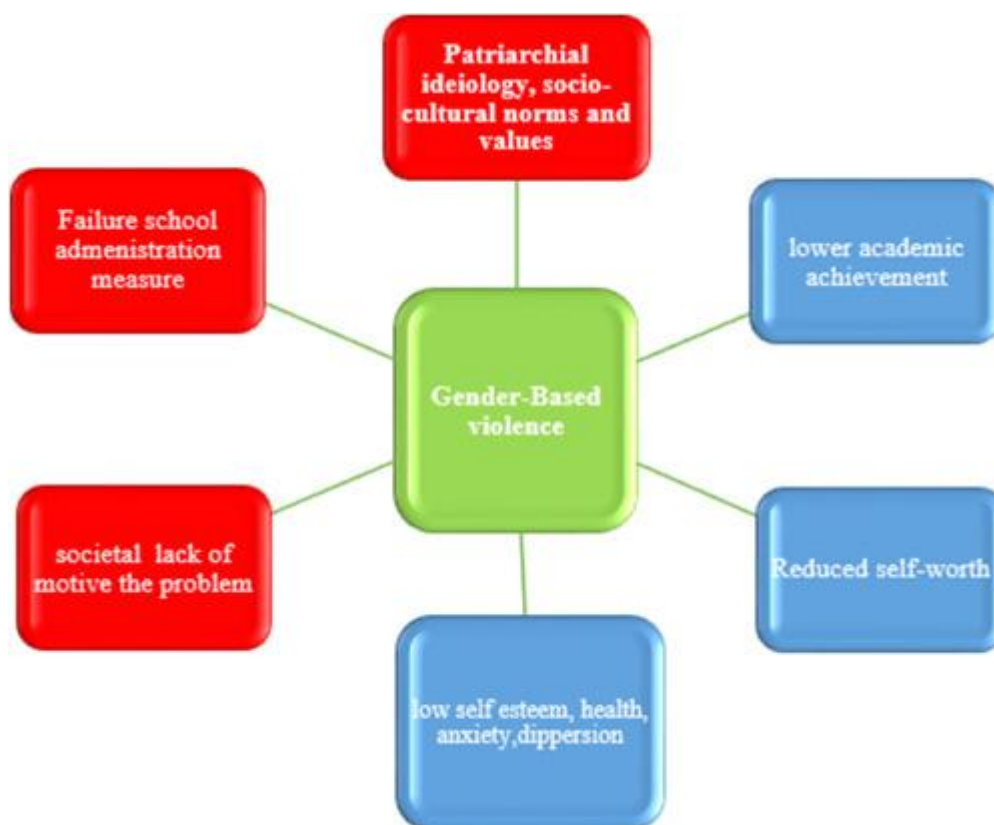
The psychosocial effects of GBV are well-documented in the literature. Feelings of worthlessness and social isolation are commonly reported among victims. These effects are often exacerbated by cultural norms and personal circumstances, as illustrated by the experiences of women in various studies (Evans & Williams, 2013; European Institute of Gender Inequality, 2022). Depression is a prevalent outcome of GBV, with victims experiencing profound mental health struggles, including hopelessness and despair (Sabri & Granger, 2018). Additionally, GBV has been linked to increased anger and irritability towards children, affecting the victims' interactions with their family members (Hossain et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2018).

### **2.5 Regional Insights: Edo State, Nigeria**

In the context of Edo State, Nigeria, gender-based violence has significant implications for women's psychosocial well-being. Uwadiogwu (2015) explores the sociological implications of GBV in Nigeria, highlighting the pervasive nature of violence and its impact on women's mental health and social stability. The effects of GBV in Edo State are compounded by limited access to support systems and legal resources, reflecting a broader challenge faced across Nigeria (Iyanda et al., 2021). The socio-cultural dynamics in Edo State, including traditional beliefs and practices, play a crucial role in shaping the experiences and responses of GBV victims.

### **2.6 Local Research and Implications**

Local studies in Edo State reveal a range of psychosocial impacts among women experiencing GBV. These include significant mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Fernández-Fillol et al., 2021). The Figure 1, typifies gender-based violence and its socio-cultural implications. The lack of robust support mechanisms and culturally sensitive interventions further exacerbates these issues, necessitating a targeted approach to address the specific needs of women in this region (Pfitzner et al., 2020; Van Daalen et al., 2022).



**Figure 1: Gender-Based Violence and its Socio-Cultural Implications**

### **III. Research Methods and Design**

#### **3.1 Study Design**

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to delve deeply into the lived experiences of women affected by gender-based violence (GBV) in Edo State, Nigeria. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the research aimed to understand the subjective experiences and personal narratives of these women within their specific sociocultural and geographic context. The phenomenological approach was chosen to illuminate the personal and often hidden dimensions of GBV, capturing how it affects the daily lives, emotional well-being, and social interactions of women. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the effects of GBV, taking into account individual perceptions and experiences within the broader framework of local cultural and social dynamics.

#### **3.2 Setting**

The study was conducted across various informal settlements in Edo State, Nigeria. Edo State, located in southern Nigeria, is known for its diverse ethnic groups, including the Bini, Esan, and Owan peoples. The state is characterized by a rich cultural heritage and a mix of urban and rural settings, which presents unique challenges and opportunities in addressing GBV. The research focused on informal settlements within major urban centers such as Benin City, as well as in rural areas surrounding the city. These settlements are home to a significant portion of the state's population and are characterized by varying levels of access to resources, social services, and infrastructure. By including both urban and rural settings, the study aimed to capture a comprehensive view of how GBV impacts women across different environments within Edo State. The choice of setting was crucial in understanding the specific sociocultural factors that influence the experiences of GBV survivors. Edo State's cultural practices, economic conditions, and social norms significantly shape the dynamics of gender-based violence, making it essential to explore these aspects in depth. This setting provided a backdrop for examining how local customs, community structures, and economic factors interact with and exacerbate the experiences of GBV survivors.

#### **1.3 Study Population and Sampling Strategy**

The research targeted women who are victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in Edo State, Nigeria. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with referrals provided by local social workers from the Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. The inclusion criteria comprised women aged 19–35 years, residing in informal settlements across Edo State, and willing to participate in telephonic

interviews. Data saturation was reached with a total of 15 participants. The potential role of network-oriented interventions for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence is shown in Figure 2 for Asylum seekers.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews, which took place between March 15 and March 19, 2021, were conducted in English and Pidgin to accommodate the participants' language preferences. Ethical considerations were rigorously followed, including ensuring participants had access to support services through local social workers if needed. This approach ensured that the interviews were conducted respectfully and safely, capturing the participants' experiences and perspectives on GBV in Edo State comprehensively.

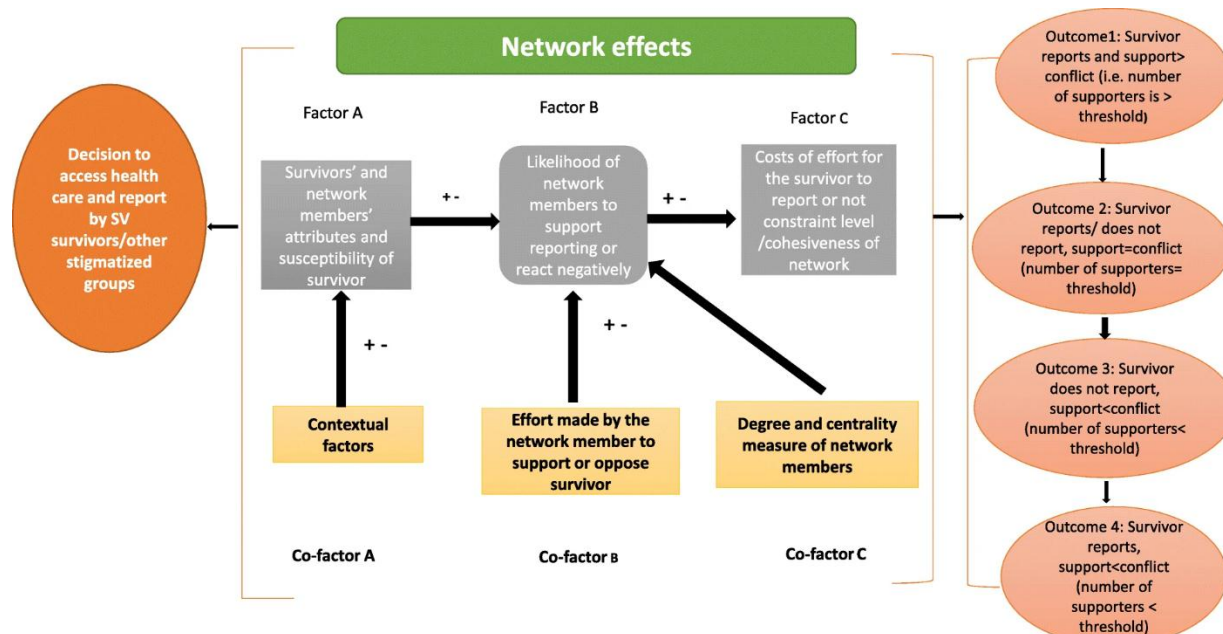


Figure 2: The potential role of network-oriented interventions for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence among asylum seekers in (BelgiumOgbe, E., Jbour, A., Rahbari, L. *et al.*, 2021)

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's methodology to understand the impact of GBV on women in Edo State. Interviews with participants were transcribed and translated into English, with translations reviewed and verified by a bilingual participant fluent in both English and the local dialects spoken in Edo State. Themes were identified and validated through participant corroboration to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. This approach helped capture the nuanced experiences of the participants and provided a comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial effects of GBV within the Edo State context.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Review Committee at a local Nigerian institution. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were fully briefed about their rights and the objectives of the study. The process ensured that participants were aware of the study's purpose and voluntarily agreed to participate, maintaining ethical standards in research involving sensitive topics in Edo State.

## IV. Results

### 4.1 Participants' Biographical Profiles

The study involved 15 female participants from Edo State, Nigeria, all of whom were Black. Their ages ranged from 19 to 35 years. Participants were all Nigerian nationals and resided in informal settlements within Edo State. The group included individuals from various marital statuses.

#### **4.1.1 Key Findings**

The thematic analysis identified four primary psychosocial effects of GBV specific to the Edo State context:

1. **Worthlessness:** Five participants reported feelings of worthlessness as a direct consequence of GBV. This sentiment was often intensified by local cultural norms and personal situations. The narratives highlighted how participants perceived themselves as devalued and insignificant due to the abuse they endured.
2. **Social Isolation:** The participants experienced significant social isolation, which was either a result of their partners' controlling behaviors or their own depression. This isolation was frequently reinforced by partners' jealousy and insecurity, leading to a diminished social network and limited interactions within their community.
3. **Depression:** Depression emerged as a major outcome of GBV. Participants detailed how the violence and its repercussions contributed to their mental health challenges, including persistent feelings of hopelessness and despair.
4. **Anger Towards Children:** Participants reported an increase in anger and irritability directed towards their children. The experiences of violence led to noticeable negative changes in their behavior, which adversely affected their interactions with their children.

#### **4.2 Regions Covered**

The study encompassed informal settlements across various regions of Edo State, providing a comprehensive view of the impact of GBV in both urban and rural settings within the state.

### **V. Discussion**

The findings highlight the complex and profound impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on women's psychosocial well-being in Edo State, Nigeria. The themes of worthlessness and social isolation underscore the deep psychological harm caused by abusive relationships and the subsequent retreat from social interactions. This sense of worthlessness often leads to withdrawal from community activities and support networks, exacerbating feelings of isolation. Additionally, the prevalence of depression and anger directed towards children reflects the wider emotional repercussions of GBV. Women affected by GBV in Edo State experience significant emotional distress, which affects their mental health and their relationships with family members. This aligns with global research on the detrimental effects of GBV, underscoring the urgent need for tailored interventions and support systems that address the specific needs of women in Edo State. These findings point to the necessity of developing targeted strategies that consider the unique cultural and social context of Edo State. Effective interventions should address the psychological damage, promote social reintegration, and offer comprehensive support to mitigate the adverse effects of GBV. Ensuring that these support systems are culturally sensitive and accessible is crucial for improving the well-being of women affected by GBV in this region.

#### **5.1 Limitations**

This study, while providing valuable insights into the psychosocial impact of gender-based violence (GBV) among women in Edo State, Nigeria, has several limitations that must be acknowledged to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

1. **Limited Geographic Scope:** The study focuses exclusively on Edo State, which, while providing detailed insights into this region, may not fully represent the situation across other states in Nigeria. GBV dynamics can vary significantly from one region to another due to differences in cultural practices, socioeconomic conditions, and levels of government intervention. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to other areas of Nigeria where the prevalence and impact of GBV might differ.
2. **Data Collection Constraints:** Data for this study was collected from a specific sample size and might not capture the full spectrum of experiences of all GBV survivors in Edo State. The reliance on self-reported data can introduce biases, as survivors might underreport their experiences due to fear of stigma or retribution. Additionally, accessibility issues in remote or conflict-affected areas might have limited the reach of the study, potentially skewing the results.
3. **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Cultural and social barriers unique to Edo State may affect both the prevalence and reporting of GBV. Traditional norms and beliefs might influence how GBV is perceived and reported, impacting the accuracy of data collected. There might be a lack of awareness or understanding about what constitutes GBV, which can result in underreporting or misidentification of cases.
4. **Temporal and Contextual Changes:** The context in which this study was conducted may change over time, particularly in response to evolving social, economic, and political factors. GBV trends can be influenced by various factors such as economic downturns, political instability, or changes in local policies. As a result, the findings might not fully account for these temporal shifts, which could affect the relevance and applicability of the conclusions over time.



**5. Resource Limitations:** The study's ability to provide a comprehensive analysis might be constrained by limited resources, including funding, time, and access to a wide range of data sources. This limitation might impact the depth of the analysis and the ability to explore all relevant aspects of GBV, including intersections with other forms of violence or socioeconomic challenges.

**6. The Complexity of GBV Dynamics:** GBV is a multifaceted issue that interacts with various factors such as gender norms, socioeconomic status, and educational levels. The study might not fully capture the complex interplay between these factors and their impact on GBV experiences in Edo State. A more nuanced exploration of these dynamics could provide deeper insights into the root causes and potential solutions. Addressing these limitations requires a broader and more inclusive approach to research on GBV, incorporating diverse perspectives and methodologies to build a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Future studies should aim to include a wider geographic scope, consider cultural and social factors more deeply, and address the resource constraints to provide more robust and generalizable findings.

## VI. Conclusion

This study emphasised the significant psychosocial consequences of gender-based violence (GBV) on women in Edo State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate a clear and harsh truth: gender-based violence not only causes physical and emotional harm, but also greatly diminishes the mental health and social well-being of its victims. The high occurrence of gender-based violence (GBV) in Edo State highlights the immediate requirement for comprehensive and culturally appropriate intervention measures specifically designed for the local circumstances. The findings of this study further emphasise the crucial need of enhancing public awareness and education on gender-based violence (GBV) in order to confront deeply ingrained cultural norms and attitudes. Moreover, there is an urgent want for resilient support structures and resources, such as easily accessible counselling, legal assistance, and secure shelters, to offer immediate and enduring relief to survivors. Efficient intervention techniques necessitate the cooperation of government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and local communities to formulate and execute policies that advance gender equality and safeguard women's rights. By tackling the underlying factors of gender-based violence (GBV) and allocating resources to preventive measures and support services, Edo State can progress towards a fairer society that values and safeguards the human rights of every individual.

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