



## Assessment of the Prevalence and Forms of Gender Based Violence Experienced by Women and Girls in Selected IDP Camps in Benue State

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study is to assess the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by women and girls in IDP camps in Benue State and the specific objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms and interventions aimed at addressing GBV in IDP camps in Benue State. The study adopts cross-sectional survey design; the study population is 57,005 from which a sample size of 422 using the Cochran (1977) statistics formula with added attrition, respondents were selected using multistage sampling procedure, questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection, data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, distribution, provides an overview of responses on key variables, including the perceived effectiveness of data management systems. The findings indicate that GBV is a widespread and critical issue within these camps, with most respondents reporting that they had experienced or witnessed some form of violence. The findings indicate that GBV has profound and multidimensional impacts on the human security of survivors, compromising their safety, mental health, economic stability, and access to essential services. Beyond immediate physical harm, GBV was found to have severe psychological consequences, with survivors experiencing depression, anxiety, and trauma. These mental health challenges undermine their ability to engage fully in social and economic activities, compounding their overall vulnerability. The study recommends that there is a need for government and critical stakeholders like management of the IDP camps, traditional leaders, religious leaders, school authorities and none governmental organizations to fund a massive public awareness on the factors influencing gender-based violence and the dangers involved in the act to help improve public knowledge towards curbing the scourge in IDP camps and the hosting communities in Benue State. It also recommends that the government and other well-meaning Nigerians

should direct their efforts at providing adequate and decent shelters, counseling, and legal aid for survivors to enable them to regain their sense of belonging in the IDP camps. This would aid the victims' quality access to justice without fear.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Prevalence, Forms, Gender, Violence

### I. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue that disproportionately affects individuals based on their gender, with women and girls facing the brunt of its impact. The United Nations (2020) defines GBV as encompassing various forms of harm, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. These forms of violence can occur in both public and private spheres, often resulting in long-lasting physical and psychological harm to victims. Globally, it is estimated that one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, highlighting the urgency of addressing this critical issue (UN Women, 2021). In conflict and displacement settings, the incidence of GBV is particularly alarming, as these environments often exacerbate existing societal inequalities and vulnerabilities.

In the context of conflict and displacement, GBV becomes an even more acute concern. The breakdown of societal norms and the weakening of legal systems in conflict zones create conditions where violence against women and girls is normalized (UNHCR, 2019). The risks are significantly heightened in situations of displacement, particularly in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where women and girls face increased vulnerabilities due to the loss of protective structures, resources, and access to essential services. Research indicates that displaced women often encounter sexual violence, domestic abuse, trafficking, and exploitation, particularly in the absence of adequate protection mechanisms



(Amnesty International, 2018). The environment within IDP camps can create a perfect storm for GBV, where crowded living conditions, lack of privacy, and the presence of armed groups contribute to heightened risks for women and girls. Women affected by conflict, and particularly women displaced by conflict, are at increased risk for gender-based violence (GBV) due to economic strain, changes in familial and community support structures, and normalization of violence in the home (Ager et al., 2018).

The concept of human security broadens the understanding of security beyond traditional military or national concerns. Human security focuses on protecting individuals from critical and pervasive threats, emphasizing their dignity and livelihood. According to the United Nations Development Programme (1994), human security encompasses "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want." It recognizes that security is not solely about military might but also about the protection of individuals from threats that undermine their well-being. In this framework, human security includes multiple dimensions—economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. This approach is particularly relevant for vulnerable populations, such as those living in IDP camps, where basic needs are often unmet, and access to protection from violence is severely limited (O'Brien & Williams, 2016). Globally, the implications of GBV for human security are profound. Women and girls displaced by conflict are at increased risk of human rights violations, which not only undermine their individual security but also destabilize entire communities. The World Health Organization (2019) reports that violence against women has significant health implications, leading to physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and mental health disorders. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of GBV can impede economic recovery and social cohesion in post-conflict societies, as victims may face barriers to employment, education, and participation in community life. This study explores the impact of GBV on human security within IDP camps in Benue State, Nigeria.

## **II. Statement of the problem**

The issue of gender-based violence (GBV) within internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Benue State, Nigeria, presents a profound challenge to human security in a region already grappling with the ramifications of ongoing violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Over the past few years, these conflicts have resulted in the displacement of more than 1.5 million individuals,

forcing them into makeshift camps that are characterized by overcrowding, inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and food (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2020). The harsh living conditions in these camps exacerbate the vulnerabilities of displaced populations, particularly women and girls, who often bear the brunt of violence and exploitation.

Furthermore, GBV manifests in various forms in these contexts, including physical violence, sexual exploitation, psychological abuse, and trafficking. Reports from organizations such as Amnesty International (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2019) indicate that displaced women face heightened risks of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and economic exploitation as they navigate their precarious environments. This violence not only violates their human rights but also leads to severe psychological, physical, and emotional trauma, creating a cycle of suffering that can persist long after the initial violence has occurred. Despite the acknowledgment of GBV as a critical issue in humanitarian contexts, the prevalence of such violence in IDP camps often remains underreported due to societal stigma, fear of retaliation, and cultural norms that discourage victims from speaking out.

Thus, efforts to address GBV in Benue State have been initiated by both the Nigerian government and various non-governmental organizations. These efforts include the establishment of legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, and support services for victims. However, these initiatives face significant obstacles, such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained personnel to respond effectively to incidents of violence (Bamgbose et al., 2020). Furthermore, existing protection mechanisms within IDP camps are often ineffective, as legal accountability for perpetrators is frequently absent, and support services remain underfunded and inadequately implemented. Consequently, previous studies have highlighted the pervasive issue of GBV in conflict-affected areas, including works by Okeke et al. (2020), which explored the mental health impacts of GBV on women in IDP camps, and Alabi (2019), who examined the socio-economic consequences of GBV on displaced populations in Nigeria. However, there is a notable gap in the literature specifically addressing the impact of GBV on human security among displaced populations in Benue State. Most existing research tends to focus broadly on GBV in conflict zones without examining the unique challenges faced by IDPs within camps. However, there is still paucity of empirical studies on the



subject matter of this study. Theoretically, most studies conducted were professional studies that does not have theoretical underpinning, geographically, the scope of past studies does not cover the specific IDP camps to be covered in this study

### 1.3 Objectives of the study

- i. The main objective of this study is to assess the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by women and girls in IDP camps in Benue State
- ii. The specific objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms and interventions aimed at addressing GBV in IDP camps in Benue State

### III. Methodology

The study adopts cross-sectional survey design; the study population is 57,005 from which a sample size of 422 using the Cochran (1977) statistics formula with added attrition, respondents were selected using multistage sampling procedure, questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection, data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, distribution, provides an overview of responses on key variables, including the perceived effectiveness of data management systems

### IV. Data Presentations

Table 4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of the respondents.

Demographics variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Below 18	42	11.0
18-24	88	23.1
25-34	112	29.4
35-44	84	22.0
45 and above	55	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	243	63.8
Male	138	36.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	98	25.7
Married	192	50.4
Divorced/Separated	47	12.3
Widowed	44	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Educational level</b>		
No Formal Education	142	37.3
Primary Education	118	31.0
Secondary Education	91	23.9
Tertiary Education	30	7.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey 2025.

Table 4.2. Experience or Witnessing GBV

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	278	72.9
No	103	27.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2025



Table 4.2 shows that a substantial majority of respondents (72.9%, n = 278) reported having experienced or witnessed gender-based violence (GBV) in the IDP camps, while 27.1% (n = 103) indicated they had not. This high prevalence indicates

that GBV is a common and pressing issue in the camps, affecting a significant portion of the population. The finding underscores the urgency for targeted interventions to protect vulnerable groups and address the factors contributing to such violence.

**Table 4.3. Forms of GBV Experienced**

Form of GBV	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Physical violence	192	69.1
Sexual violence	154	55.4
Psychological abuse	168	60.4
Economic abuse	121	43.5
Other	37	13.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 highlight that physical violence (69.1%), psychological abuse (60.4%), sexual violence (55.4%), and economic abuse (43.5%) are the most common forms of GBV. This demonstrates that IDPs are exposed to multifaceted violence affecting their physical, emotional, and economic well-being. The frequent occurrence of

these abuses suggests that victims face repeated exposure, increasing long-term vulnerabilities and potential trauma. These results demonstrate that GBV in IDP camps is multi-dimensional, with physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuses being prevalent.

**Table 4.4. Frequency of GBV Occurrence**

Form of GBV	Frequency (n)	Percentage (% of 278)
Physical violence	192	69.1
Sexual violence	154	55.4
Psychological abuse	168	60.4
Economic abuse	121	43.5
Other	37	13.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.4 mirrors the patterns observed in Table 4.3, confirming that physical violence (69.1%) and psychological abuse (60.4%) are the most frequent forms of GBV, followed by sexual violence

(55.4%) and economic abuse (43.5%). The recurrence of these abuses indicates that victims may face repeated exposure to violence, heightening the impact on their physical and mental well-being.

**Table 4.5. Primary Perpetrators of GBV**

Perpetrator	Frequency (n)	Percentage (% of 278)
Camp officials	69	24.8
Security personnel	81	29.1
Spouses/Partners	103	37.1
Fellow camp residents	118	42.4
Other	24	8.6

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.5 identifies the primary perpetrators, with fellow camp residents (42.4%) and spouses/partners (37.1%) leading, followed by security personnel. The involvement of both internal and institutional actors implies systemic gaps in protection and accountability mechanisms within the

camps, putting residents at risk even from those expected to provide safety. This shows that both internal (residents and family members) and external (officials and security personnel) actors contribute to the prevalence of GBV, reflecting a complex web of vulnerability.



**Table 4.6. Most Vulnerable Groups to GBV**

Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Women (18 years and above)	167	43.8
Girls (under 18 years)	122	32.0
Elderly women	46	12.1
Men	28	7.3
Boys	18	4.8
Total	381	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.6 shows that adult women (43.8%) and girls under 18 (32.0%) are the most vulnerable, followed by elderly women, men, and boys. This underscores that GBV disproportionately affects females, particularly women and girls, while still

affecting other groups to a lesser extent. This highlights those women and girl remain the most vulnerable to GBV in IDP camps, reinforcing the need for gender-sensitive protection mechanisms.

**Table 4.10. Responses on support services available for GBV survivors in the camp**

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	210	55.1%
No	171	44.9%
Total	381	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The fifth objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms and interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in IDP camps. Slightly over half of the respondents (55.1%) reported that support services for GBV survivors are available in

the camps, while 44.9% indicated that such services are not available. This suggests that although some mechanisms exist, there is a significant portion of the population that does not have access to formal support.

**Table 4.11 Responses on types of services**

Service Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Healthcare services	150	71.4%
Legal aid	98	46.7%
Psychosocial support	120	57.1%
Reporting channels	135	64.3%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Among the available services, healthcare services were the most common (71.4%), followed by reporting channels (64.3%), psychosocial support (57.1%), and legal aid (46.7%). This distribution indicates that while basic medical and reporting

services are somewhat accessible, critical services such as legal aid and psychosocial support are less widespread, potentially limiting comprehensive care for survivors.

**Table 4.12. Responses on Accessibility of services for GBV survivors**

Service Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Easily accessible	92	24.1%
Somewhat accessible	160	42.0%
Not accessible	129	33.9%
Total	381	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Among the available services, healthcare services were the most common (71.4%), followed by

reporting channels (64.3%), psychosocial support (57.1%), and legal aid (46.7%). This distribution



indicates that while basic medical and reporting services are somewhat accessible, critical services such as legal aid and psychosocial support are less

widespread, potentially limiting comprehensive care for survivors.

**Table 4.13. Responses on the Effectiveness of support services in addressing GBV**

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very effective	70	18.4%
Somewhat effective	165	43.3%
Not effective	146	38.3%
Total	381	100%

A small proportion of respondents (18.4%) rated the services as very effective, 43.3% considered them somewhat effective, and 38.3% viewed them as not effective. This suggests that even when services are available, their capacity to adequately address the needs of GBV survivors is limited.

**Table 4.14. Responses on the Challenges faced by GBV survivors when seeking support**

Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Lack of trust in service providers	140	66.7%
Fear of stigmatization	125	59.5%
Lack of knowledge about services	118	56.2%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The major challenges reported include lack of trust in service providers (66.7%), fear of stigmatization (59.5%), and lack of knowledge about available services (56.2%). These challenges indicate that social, cultural, and informational barriers significantly hinder survivors from accessing the support they need.

## V. Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this study was to assess the prevalence and forms of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by women and girls in IDP camps in Benue State. The findings revealed that GBV is a widespread and critical issue within these camps, with most respondents reporting that they had experienced or witnessed some form of violence. This underscores the vulnerability of displaced populations, particularly women and girls, to threats that compromise their physical, emotional, and economic well-being.

The second objective of the study was to analyze the implications of gender-based violence (GBV) on the human security of displaced women and girls in IDP camps in Benue State, focusing on physical, psychological, and economic well-being. The findings indicate that GBV has profound and multidimensional impacts on the human security of survivors, compromising their safety, mental health, economic stability, and access to essential services. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that GBV compromises physical security, exposing women and girls to injuries, threats, and ongoing vulnerability

within the camp environment. Beyond immediate physical harm, GBV was found to have severe psychological consequences, with survivors experiencing depression, anxiety, and trauma. These mental health challenges undermine their ability to engage fully in social and economic activities, compounding their overall vulnerability.

## VI. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in view of the findings of the study:

- i. This study recommends that there is a need for government and critical stakeholders like management of the IDP camps, traditional leaders, religious leaders, school authorities and none governmental organizations to fund a massive public awareness on the factors influencing gender-based violence and the dangers involved in the act to help improve public knowledge towards curbing the scourge in IDP camps and the hosting communities in Benue State. The awareness campaign will further strengthen the existing initiatives, like the "Social Safeguard for Benue" initiative aimed at creating awareness against violence against people.
- ii. This study further recommends that the government and other well-meaning Nigerians should direct their efforts at providing adequate and decent shelters, counseling, and legal aid for survivors to enable them to regain their sense of belonging in the IDP camps. This would aid the victims' quality access to justice without fear.



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