



# GENDER JUSTICE ACTION RESEARCH

MITIGATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG) JUSTIFICATIONS

*'Compassion and Protection: VAWG Islamic Perspectives'*



## CASE STUDIES

2025

Supported by:  
**Ford Foundation**

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT  
AND PROTECTION ALTERNATIVE (WRAPA)**

*Women at the Centre: Strengthening Capacity and Resilience  
for Women's Rights Advancement*

Supported by Ford Foundation

**Gender Justice Action Research Case Study Compendium**

**Compassion and Protection:  
A Replicable Faith-Based Model for Preventing and Responding to  
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

**Prepared by:**

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

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**Gender Justice Action Research Case Study Compendium  
Compassion and Protection: A Replicable Faith-Based Model for Preventing and  
Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

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**Research Lead:  
Prof. Tasiu Muhammed Dansabo**

**Contributors and Technical Support:**

**Saudatu Mahdi**  
Secretary General - Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

**Yemisi Nathaniel**  
Director of Programs - Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

**Habiba Ahmed**  
Senior Programs Officer, Knowledge Management and Impact - Women's Rights  
Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)

**Documentation and Case Study Development:  
WRAPA Programmes and Management Team**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over two decades, the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) has worked at the intersection of faith, justice, and women's rights to prevent and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Northern Nigeria. Contrary to the widespread assumption that religion is a barrier to gender justice, WRAPA's experience demonstrates that faith, when correctly interpreted and institutionally applied, can be a powerful driver of protection, accountability, and social change.

This case study compendium documents and distils WRAPA practical experience engaging leaders of faith and culture, including Islamic scholars, Imams, Shari'a Court judges (Khadis), and Hisbah institutions, to advance survivor-centred, faith-consistent responses to VAWG. It captures both success stories and the processes that made those successes possible, translating them into a model that can be adopted and replicated by civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), justice institutions, and development partners.

The compendium presents fully developed case studies drawn from WRAPA field engagements across multiple states. Each case documents the social and religious context, stakeholder dynamics, faith and legal reasoning, step-by-step intervention processes, outcomes, challenges, and lessons learned. Together, they illustrate three complementary pathways for engaging faith systems: court-led justice, scholar-led norm correction, and institutional collaboration.

Beyond documentation, this compendium is intentionally designed as a practice and learning tool. It includes replication checklists, “what to do/what not to do” guidance, survivor voice reflections, and facilitator notes for training. By grounding interventions in Qur'an, Sunnah, and Maliki jurisprudence while centring survivor dignity and safety, the WRAPA model demonstrates that preventing and responding to VAWG is not external to Islamic values, but firmly rooted within them.

This compendium is intended to support practitioners, policymakers, and partners seeking sustainable, locally owned solutions to VAWG through faith-consistent justice systems.

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## ACRONYMS

CICID	Centre for Islamic Civilisation and Interfaith Dialogue
CSO	Civil Society Organisation (s)
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FGD	Focus Group Discussion(s)
FIDA	Federación Internacional de Abogadas (which translates to International Federation of Women Lawyers)
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria.
GBV	Gender-Based Violence (full phrase appears in the report)
IDI	In-Depth Interview(s)
IFL	Islamic Family Law
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JIBWIS	Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah wa Iqamatus Sunnah (often translated as the Society for the Removal of Innovation (Bid'ah) and the Re-establishment of the Sunnah)
KII	Key Informant Interview(s)
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
SAW	Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam, meaning “May Allah's blessings and peace be upon him” (often rendered in English as “Peace be upon him / Peace and blessings be upon him”) (used as an honorific for the Prophet Muhammad)
VAPP	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative

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WRAPA also recognises the contributions of civil society actors and frontline responders who provided accompaniment, protection, and sustained support to survivors navigating complex and often hostile systems. Their role in bridging survivors to justice remains indispensable.

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Finally, appreciation is extended to all partners and stakeholders who continue to work toward a society where dignity, safety, and justice are not negotiable but guaranteed.

# INTRODUCTION

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains one of the most pervasive human rights challenges in Nigeria, particularly in contexts where social norms, cultural expectations, and religious interpretations intersect to silence survivors and normalise harm. In many Muslim communities, harmful practices are often incorrectly justified in the name of religion, creating barriers to reporting, justice, and protection.

WRAPA's long-standing work challenges this narrative. Since its establishment, WRAPA has advanced the position that **Islam, when understood through its principles of justice ('*adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), dignity (*karamah*), and non-harm (*la darar wa la dirar*)**, provides a strong foundation for protecting women and girls and holding perpetrators accountable. The organisation's approach does not seek to confront faith institutions from the outside, but to **work within them**, strengthening their capacity to deliver justice that is both theologically sound and survivor-centred.

This compendium was developed to systematically document WRAPA's experience working with leaders of faith and culture and to respond to a critical gap in programming and learning: while many initiatives engage religious actors, few clearly document **how change happens**, what processes work, and how those processes can be replicated responsibly.

The document, therefore, serves three core purposes. First, it captures concrete examples of successful faith-based interventions addressing VAWG. Second, it documents the institutional, theological, and programmatic processes that enabled those successes. Third, it provides a practical guide that CSOs and partners can adapt to engage leaders of faith and culture in their own contexts.

The compendium is organised to move the reader from **understanding the WRAPA model to learning from detailed case studies**, and finally to **applying the model through practical guidance and facilitation notes**. It is intended for use not only as a reference document but as a living tool for training, advocacy, and program design aimed at advancing justice, dignity, and protection for women and girls within faith contexts.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this case study are to:

1. Document real-life cases of Violence Against Women and Girls addressed within Islamic legal and faith-based contexts in Northern Nigeria
2. Demonstrate how Islamic principles of justice, compassion, dignity, and non-harm support survivor protection and accountability
3. Illustrate the practical roles of Shari'a courts, Islamic scholars, and faith institutions in responding to violence against women
4. Highlight patterns of harm, protection, and institutional gaps across different family and marital settings
5. Provide evidence that faith-consistent approaches can be effective tools for advocacy, institutional reform, and survivor-centred justice

# WRAPA FAITH-CONSISTENT MODEL

## 1. PROBLEM CONTEXT

VAWG persists in many Muslim communities not because of Islam, but due to:

- Patriarchal cultural norms
- Misinterpretation of Islamic texts
- Weak enforcement of protective laws
- Stigma and fear surrounding reporting

WRAPA experience over 25 years demonstrates that **lasting change occurs when reform is rooted in faith systems**, not imposed externally.

## 2. WRAPA THEORY OF CHANGE

**If** Islamic principles of compassion (rahmah), justice ('adl), dignity (karamah), and non-harm (la darar wa la dirar) are reclaimed and activated by trusted religious and justice institutions,

**Then** survivors will seek justice, harmful norms will be challenged, and communities will sustain change.

## 3. CORE PILLARS OF THE WRAPA MODEL

1. **Faith Legitimacy** – grounding interventions in Qur'an, Sunnah, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah
2. **Institutional Anchoring** – working through Shari'a courts, Hisbah, and religious councils
3. **Survivor-Centred Justice** – dignity, confidentiality, choice, and protection
4. **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration** – CSOs, scholars, courts, women's groups
5. **Documentation & Learning** – capturing cases to build precedents

## HOW TO USE THIS COMPENDIUM

This compendium is designed as a **practical, step-by-step resource** for civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), development partners, and justice sector actors seeking to work effectively with **leaders of faith and culture** to prevent and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

It is intentionally written as a **practice guide**, not a theoretical report.

## **QUICK-START: HOW TO REPLICATE THE WRAPA MODEL**

This section is for CSOs who want to move quickly from learning to action.

### **STEP 1: Establish Faith Legitimacy**

Identify respected Islamic scholars, Imams, Khadis, or Hisbah actors with moral authority. Begin engagement using Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic legal principles that emphasise justice, dignity, and non-harm.

### **STEP 2: Map Power and Influence**

Identify who holds religious, judicial, and cultural authority in the community. Understand who can block change and who can enable it.

### **STEP 3: Centre the Survivor**

Ensure confidentiality, informed choice, and accompaniment. Do not expose survivors to public processes without safeguards.

### **STEP 4: Choose the Right Entry Point**

Decide whether the intervention should be court-led, scholar-led, or institutionally coordinated, based on survivor safety and context.

### **STEP 5: Document and Learn**

Use the case study template in this compendium to document processes, outcomes, and lessons for replication.



# CASE STUDIES

## Compassion and Protection in Practice

The following case studies document how violence against women and girls manifests within marital, post-marital, and family contexts in Northern Nigeria, and how Islamic legal and faith-based mechanisms have been applied in response. Each case centres on lived experience and focuses on harm, protection, and outcome, rather than process.

Together, these cases demonstrate that violence is not sustained by faith, but by silence, stigma, and unequal power. They also show that when Islamic principles are applied with clarity and accountability, they can function as effective tools for survivor protection and justice.

### CASE 1

#### **Kebbi State | Post-Marital Coercive Control, Reputational Harm & Institutional Harassment | Shari'a Court + CSO Accompaniment**

#### **CASE SNAPSHOT**

**a. Type of VAWG:**

Post-marital psychological violence, reputational harm, economic abuse, coercive control, and institutional harassment

**b. Primary Institution:**

Shari'a Court (with police and justice-system interface)

**c. Faith Actors Involved:**

Shari'a court officials; Islamic legal principles applied through judicial reasoning

**d. Outcome:**

Survivor's autonomy restored; prolonged harassment stopped; dignity and stability regained

### **1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

This case demonstrates that **violence against women and girls does not necessarily end with divorce**. In this instance, the survivor continued to experience sustained harm *after* marital dissolution through non-physical but deeply damaging forms of violence.

The survivor lived in a context where:

- a. Women are expected to demonstrate *sabr* (patience) even in situations of harm
- b. Divorce carries social stigma, particularly for women
- c. Male authority is often reinforced through social influence and institutional access

Following divorce, the former husband retained significant social and institutional leverage.

Rather than disengaging, he used **reputational attacks, housing insecurity, intimidation, and repeated engagement with police and court processes** to maintain control over the survivor's life.

The survivor's vulnerability was significantly heightened by the illness and eventual death of her parents, who had previously served as her primary emotional and social protection. With this safety net removed, coercive control intensified.

**Replication Tip:**

Always assess whether harm continues *after* divorce or separation. Post-marital violence is frequently overlooked but can be as damaging as in-marriage abuse.

**2. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVED**

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor	The rights holder and primary victim of post-marital abuse	Central
Former husband	Perpetrator using social and institutional power	High
Police	Enforcement actors involved in detention and eviction processes	Medium
Shari'a Court	Legal authority overseeing prolonged litigation	High
CSO (WRAPA)	Legal aid, advocacy, sustained accompaniment	High
Community members	Sources of stigma, rumour, and social pressure	Medium
Survivor's children	Indirect victims affected by instability	Medium

**Why this mapping mattered:**

It clarified that harm was being reproduced not only by an individual, but through **institutions and social systems**, requiring sustained accompaniment rather than one-off legal action.

**3. INCIDENT SUMMARY**

The survivor's experience unfolded in phases:

1. **Marital breakdown and divorce**, triggered by conflict following the husband's remarriage.
2. **Post-divorce escalation of abuse**, rather than resolution.

After divorce, the perpetrator:

- a. Publicly defamed the survivor, portraying her as morally deficient

- b. Triggered repeated evictions from rented accommodation, leading to housing instability
- c. Used police involvement to intimidate and detain the survivor
- d. Prolonged court processes through delays, pressure, and procedural manipulation

These acts functioned collectively as **coercive control**, designed to exhaust the survivor emotionally, financially, and psychologically, and to discourage her from pursuing justice or rebuilding her life independently.

Importantly, there was **no single dramatic incident**. The harm lay in its *persistence*, *accumulation*, and *institutional reinforcement*.

#### 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

##### *Why Intervention Was Legitimate*

Islamic jurisprudence clearly establishes that harm (*darar*) is prohibited, regardless of whether it is physical or non-physical.

Key principles applied in this case include:

- **Qur'an 30:21**  
Marriage is intended to be a source of tranquillity, affection, and mercy. Where fear, humiliation, and instability replace these values, the moral basis of the relationship collapses.
- **La darar wa la dirar (No harm shall be inflicted or reciprocated)**  
Harm in Islamic law includes psychological suffering, reputational damage, economic deprivation, and insecurity. The perpetrator's conduct clearly fell within this definition.
- **Qur'an 2:231**  
Prohibits retaining or managing marital ties in ways that cause harm or transgression. This principle extends to post-marital conduct when former spouses use power to continue oppression.
- **Qur'an 4:130**  
Affirms lawful separation when peaceful coexistence is no longer possible, removing any religious obligation to endure sustained harm.

This analysis establishes that **the survivor's pursuit of institutional protection was not a failure of patience or faith**, but an exercise of her Islamic right to dignity, safety, and justice.

##### **Replication Tip:**

Explicitly frame post-divorce harassment as *darar*. This is critical for faith legitimacy and institutional acceptance.

#### 5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION

This case demonstrates that **change occurred through a sustained process, not a single intervention**.

**Step 1: Survivor disclosure and CSO engagement**

The survivor approached a CSO after repeated harm and intimidation. This disclosure marked the first shift from isolation to structured support.

**Step 2: Documentation of patterns of harm**

Rather than focusing on isolated incidents, the CSO documented *patterns* of defamation, eviction, detention threats, and procedural abuse.

**Step 3: Legal accompaniment initiated**

The CSO provided continuous legal presence during court processes, reducing the survivor's exposure to intimidation and procedural manipulation.

**Step 4: Persistence through prolonged litigation**

Despite delays and pressure to withdraw, the survivor supported by accompaniment remained engaged in the justice process.

**Step 5: Effective separation and personal freedom secured**

Over time, sustained advocacy disrupted the perpetrator's ability to use institutions as tools of control.

**Step 6: Post-judgment recovery and stabilisation**

Support extended beyond court outcomes, enabling the survivor to rebuild stability and secure her children's wellbeing and education.

**Replication Tip:**

Treat accompaniment as a protection strategy, not a service add-on.

**6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES****Survivor Voice (Anonymised):**

“For a long time, I believed patience was my only option. When I understood my rights in Islam, I knew Allah does not want harm for my children.”

**Key outcomes achieved:**

1. Institutional harassment ceased
2. Survivor regained autonomy and stability
3. Children's welfare and education secured
4. Survivor rebuilt confidence and independence

**7. SUCCESS FACTORS**

1. Survivor persistence despite prolonged intimidation
2. Continuous CSO legal accompaniment
3. Faith-consistent framing of harm and dignity
4. Recognition of non-physical violence by institutions

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

BARRIER	HOW IT WAS ADDRESSED
Stigma and reputational fear	Faith-based framing of justice and dignity
Police misuse and intimidation	Legal presence and documentation
Procedural delays	Sustained engagement and refusal to withdraw
Loss of family support	CSO accompaniment and follow-up

### Replication Tip:

Expect resistance when harm is institutionalised. Plan for duration, not speed.

## 9. REPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. Recognise post-marital violence as VAWG
2. Document patterns, not isolated incidents
3. Provide continuous legal accompaniment
4. Monitor police and court interactions
5. Extend support beyond legal judgment
6. Protect survivor confidentiality at all stages

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. Divorce does not automatically end violence
2. Coercive control can be institutional and reputational
3. Survivors often persist when supported, not because harm is minor

### Recommendations

1. Protection frameworks should explicitly include post-marital harm
2. Justice institutions must guard against procedural abuse
3. Faith-based interpretation should be used to delegitimise endurance-based silence
4. CSO–court collaboration should include post-judgment monitoring and recovery support

## CASE STUDY 2

### Katsina State (Kankia) | Forced Marriage, Severe Physical Violence & Life-Threatening Harm | Shari'a Court + Hisbah Protection + Clerical Fatwa

#### CASE SNAPSHOT

**1. Type of VAWG:**

Forced marriage, severe physical violence, torture, life-threatening harm

**2. Primary Institution:**

Shari'a Court, Kankia (with police and Hisbah interface)

**3. Faith Actors Involved:**

Islamic clerics/scholars, senior religious leaders, Hisbah

**4. Outcome:**

Perpetrator convicted and imprisoned; survivor removed from harm, protected during and after trial, medically treated, and supported to rebuild her life

#### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This case occurred in **Kankia town, Katsina State**, within a social context where **forced marriage of young women remains culturally tolerated**, particularly when decisions are driven by family authority rather than the consent of the girl involved.

The survivor was **19 years old** at the time of marriage and entered the union **without her consent**. Her youth, economic dependence, and isolation within the marital home significantly reduced her ability to seek help. These factors created conditions in which violence could escalate rapidly without early detection or intervention.

Another critical contextual factor was **power imbalance**. The perpetrator's family was described as **wealthy and socially influential**, which later enabled them to attempt to derail the justice process through pressure for an informal settlement. In many similar contexts, such pressure successfully silences survivors and prevents accountability.

#### Replication Tip:

Forced marriage should always be treated as a **high-risk protection context**, not merely a family or cultural issue. Early intervention is essential because harm often escalates quickly.

## 2. STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor (19-year-old girl)	Rights holder; victim of forced marriage and torture	Central
Husband	Perpetrator of severe physical violence	High
Survivor's parents	Guardians; targets of settlement pressure	Medium
Perpetrator's family	Attempted to influence the outcome through wealth and status	High
Community member (neighbor)	First responder who received disclosure	High
CSO	Emergency response, medical support, legal action	High
Islamic clerics / scholars	Issued fatwa and religious guidance	High
Hisbah	Protection and monitoring	High
Police	Initial reporting and documentation	Medium
Health facility	Emergency medical treatment	Medium
Shari'a Court (Kankia)	Judicial authority	High

### Why this mapping mattered:

It revealed that justice could not rely on a single institution. Protection, legitimacy, and accountability required coordinated action across community, religious, legal, and enforcement actors.

## 3. INCIDENT SUMMARY

Shortly after the forced marriage in 2024, the survivor began to experience severe and escalating physical violence. The abuse included acts of torture, notably burning, which resulted in first-degree burn injuries and posed a credible threat to her life.

The violence was not isolated. It formed a sustained pattern that rapidly crossed from domestic abuse into life-threatening harm. Because the survivor was young and isolated, the abuse might have remained hidden if not for disclosure to a neighbour.

Upon hearing the survivor's account and observing the injuries, the neighbour contacted a civil society organization (CSO). This single act of disclosure transformed a private situation of extreme danger into a formal protection and justice pathway.

#### 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Islamic jurisprudence is unequivocal in condemning harm, torture, and life-threatening abuse.

Key principles applied include:

- **Qur'an 4:19**  
Commands kind and dignified treatment of wives. Torture and burning constitute a direct violation of this injunction.
- **La darar wa la dirar**  
The principle that harm must neither be inflicted nor tolerated. Severe physical violence clearly meets the threshold of *darar*.
- **Hifz al-nafs (Preservation of life)**  
One of the core objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law. When a marital relationship threatens life, protection takes precedence over marital continuity.
- **Juristic position on dissolution due to harm**  
Sustained, life-threatening harm renders continued cohabitation religiously impermissible.

On this basis, Islamic clerics issued a fatwa declaring that the survivor could not be compelled to remain in the marriage. This fatwa was critical in countering attempts to frame the violence as a “family issue” or to force reconciliation.

#### Replication Tip:

In cases of severe harm, a clear religious ruling can decisively block compromise pressure and legitimise institutional intervention.

#### 5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION

This case followed a sequenced, protection-first pathway:

##### Step 1: Community disclosure

The survivor disclosed the abuse to a neighbor, who acted as a first responder.

##### Step 2: Rapid CSO intervention

The CSO immediately removed the survivor from the abusive environment, prioritising safety.

##### Step 3: Medical response

The survivor was taken to a health facility for urgent treatment of burn injuries. The CSO paid medical bills to remove financial barriers and ensure documentation.

##### Step 4: Police reporting

A formal complaint was lodged to initiate the justice process and preserve evidence.

### **Step 5: Shari'a court filing**

The case was filed at the Shari'a Court in Kankia, anchoring accountability within a faith-legitimate institution.

### **Step 6: Clerical intervention and fatwa**

Islamic clerics issued a fatwa declaring continued cohabitation impermissible due to life-threatening harm.

### **Step 7: Hisbah protection**

Hisbah provided security and protection during court proceedings to prevent intimidation or retaliation.

### **Step 8: Judgment and sentencing**

In August 2025, the Shari'a Court found the husband guilty and sentenced him to imprisonment.

### **Step 9: Post-judgment support**

The survivor received livelihood support and monitoring. Hisbah warned the perpetrator's family against witch-hunting or harassment.

### **Replication Tip:**

Always combine justice processes with protection before, during, and after trial.

## **6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES**

Survivor Voice:

“When the scholars said Islam does not allow this harm, I knew I was not wrong to seek help.”

### **Key outcomes achieved:**

- Perpetrator held criminally accountable
- Survivor's life and safety secured
- Physical recovery supported
- Livelihood support enabled economic independence
- Community deterrence created

## **7. SUCCESS FACTORS**

- Presence of a community first responder
- Rapid CSO-led emergency response
- Faith legitimacy through clerical fatwa
- Hisbah protection reduces retaliation risk
- Post-judgment recovery support

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

BARRIER	RESPONSE
Forced marriage norms	Treated as a protection risk
Wealth-based settlement pressure	Countered by fatwa
Risk of retaliation	Hisbah protection
Financial barriers to healthcare	CSO covered costs

### Replication Tip:

Anticipate compromise pressure when perpetrators have social or economic power.

## 9. REPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. Treat forced marriage as an emergency protection issue
2. Build community first-responder networks
3. Integrate healthcare into the VAWG response
4. Engage credible clerics early
5. Use Shari'a courts for faith-legitimate accountability
6. Pair judgment with survivor recovery and monitoring

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. Forced marriage significantly heightens VAWG risk
2. Severe harm requires immediate removal and protection
3. Faith-based legitimacy can neutralise power-driven interference

### Recommendations

1. Develop rapid response protocols for forced marriage cases
2. Formalise CSO–cleric–Hisbah collaboration
3. Ensure post-judgment support to prevent re-victimisation

## CASE STUDY 3

### Kaduna State | Multidimensional VAWG (Psychological, Emotional, Social & Spiritual Abuse) | Faith-Based Institutional Entry Point (Bureau of Religious Affairs – Muslim Matters)

#### CASE SNAPSHOT (AT A GLANCE)

**1. Type of VAWG:**

Psychological violence, emotional abuse, coercive control, social and cultural violence, spiritual/religious abuse

**2. Primary Institution:**

Bureau of Religious Affairs (Muslim Matters), Kaduna State

**3. Faith Actors Involved:**

Islamic scholars, religious women advisers, and officials of the Bureau of Religious Affairs

**4. Outcome:**

Survivor obtained clarity on marital status, regained dignity and personal certainty, and achieved a faith-legitimate resolution without coercive reconciliation

#### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This case highlights a form of violence that is highly prevalent but often invisible: harm that is psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual rather than overtly physical. The survivor described living under persistent fear, stress, and emotional instability that affected her mental health, decision-making capacity, physical well-being, and spiritual confidence.

The social and religious environment played a decisive role in sustaining the abuse. Community norms strongly discouraged women from “exposing” marital problems, framing silence as virtue and disclosure as shameful. The survivor explained that women often endure such harm because of:

- Fear of stigma and blame
- Pressure to preserve family honour
- Hope that the perpetrator will change
- Religious and cultural expectations of endurance

A further complicating factor was **expanded perpetratorship**. Harm did not originate from the husband alone. In-laws, extended family members, neighbours, and other social actors contributed to pressure, manipulation, and destabilisation—sometimes exploiting

marital conflict for personal or economic advantage.

### Replication Tip:

VAWG assessments must look beyond physical injury and beyond the husband alone. Social and spiritual harm can be equally destructive and require institutional response.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor	The rights holder is experiencing multidimensional abuse	Central
Husband	Primary source of domestic conflict and abuse	High
In-laws / extended family	Reinforced pressure and power imbalance	Medium
Community members	Normalised silence and stigma	Medium
Religious women advisers	First point of faith-based support	Medium
Bureau of Religious Affairs (Muslim Matters)	Institutional religious authority	High
Islamic scholars/leaders	Interpreters of Islamic principles	High
Family elders/mediators	Informal conflict resolvers	Low– Medium

### Why this mapping mattered:

It showed that **informal mediation alone was insufficient** and that a recognised institutional religious authority was required to restore clarity and dignity.

## 3. INCIDENT SUMMARY

The survivor lived for an extended period under conditions of emotional intimidation, psychological stress, and social pressure. Although physical violence was not the central feature, the harm was profound and cumulative. She described:

- Constant fear and anxiety

- Loss of confidence and emotional stability
- Pressure to remain silent to avoid social backlash
- Spiritual confusion caused by the misuse of religious concepts such as patience and obedience

Initially, the survivor attempted to cope privately through prayer and reflection. She then sought advice from experienced women within her religious community. While this provided emotional support, it did not resolve the underlying harm or clarify her rights.

The turning point came when she approached the **Bureau of Religious Affairs (Muslim Matters)** in Kaduna State. This institution provided authoritative, faith-consistent guidance on her marital status and rights under Islam, allowing her to make informed decisions without coercion.

#### 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Islamic principles clearly reject oppression, humiliation, and sustained emotional harm.

Key foundations applied in this case include:

##### 1. **Human dignity (karāmah)**

Qur'an 17:70 affirms the dignity of all human beings. Persistent emotional abuse, humiliation, and psychological destabilisation violate this dignity.

##### 2. **Justice over misplaced patience**

Qur'an 4:135 calls believers to stand firmly for justice. Endurance (*sabr*) cannot be used to legitimise ongoing harm.

##### 3. **Prohibition of oppression**

The Qur'an repeatedly condemns wrongdoing and injustice (e.g., Qur'an 3:57). Silence in the face of oppression is not a religious obligation.

##### 4. **Legitimacy of separation**

Qur'an 4:130 affirms that separation is permissible when peaceful and just coexistence is no longer possible.

The Bureau of Religious Affairs functioned as a **corrective Islamic authority**, countering misinterpretations that trap women in harm and restoring moral and legal clarity.

#### **Replication Tip:**

Many survivors seek *moral certainty*, not only legal outcomes. Faith-based institutional guidance can be a legitimate form of justice.

#### 5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION

This case followed a **non-litigious but institutionally anchored pathway:**

1. Survivor endured harm in silence due to stigma and fear

2. Survivor sought spiritual coping through prayer
3. Informal consultation with religious women advisers
4. Referral to Bureau of Religious Affairs (Muslim Matters)
5. Institutional religious guidance provided on rights and marital status
6. Survivor regained clarity, dignity, and decision-making autonomy

**Why this process worked:**

The intervention respected the survivor's faith context while refusing to normalise harm. It replaced confusion with authoritative clarity.

## **6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES**

**Survivor Voice (Anonymised):**

“When I understood what Islam actually says, I felt peace. I knew I was not wrong.”

**Key outcomes:**

- Restoration of personal certainty and dignity
- Faith-consistent resolution without coercion
- Reduced psychological distress
- Empowerment to make informed decisions

## **7. SUCCESS FACTORS**

- Survivor's willingness to seek help despite stigma
- Availability of a trusted institutional religious authority
- Rights-affirming Islamic interpretation
- Avoidance of forced reconciliation

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

BARRIER	HOW IT WAS ADDRESSED
Stigma and fear of exposure	Confidential institutional guidance
Misuse of religious concepts	Corrective Islamic interpretation
Ineffective informal mediation	Escalation to institutional authority
Psychological isolation	Faith-based validation of survivor experience

### Replication Tip:

Confidentiality and legitimacy are critical when addressing non-physical harm.

## 9. REPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. Recognise emotional and spiritual abuse as VAWG
2. Do not rely solely on informal mediation
3. Provide confidential, faith-legitimate guidance
4. Avoid coercive reconciliation
5. Integrate spiritual wellbeing into protection work

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. VAWG often manifests without physical injury
2. Silence is sustained by stigma, not absence of harm
3. Faith institutions can deliver justice outside courts

### Recommendations

1. Expand community awareness that emotional abuse is harmful
2. Strengthen institutional religious mechanisms as early entry points
3. Train faith actors on rights-affirming Islamic interpretation
4. Link faith-based guidance to CSO referral pathways where needed

## CASE STUDY 4

### Legal Case | Nura Muhammad v. Hadiza Abubakar | Maintenance Neglect (*Nafaqa*) as Darar | Shari'a Court–Led Judicial Accountability

#### CASE SNAPSHOT

**1. Type of VAWG:**

Economic violence, denial of maintenance (*nafaqa*), neglect, marital harm (*darar*)

**2. Primary Institution:**

Shari'a Court (Northern Nigeria)

**3. Faith Actors Involved:**

Shari'a court judge (Khadi); Islamic legal principles applied through judicial reasoning

**4. Outcome:**

Judicial recognition of maintenance denial as actionable harm; husband held legally accountable; survivor's economic dignity and rights affirmed

#### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This case illustrates a **common but often normalised form of VAWG**: denial of maintenance within marriage. Economic violence frequently remains invisible because it does not involve physical assault, yet it produces profound harm by trapping women in dependency, insecurity, and humiliation.

In this case, the survivor was legally married under Islamic law but was **systematically denied financial support**, despite the husband's obligation to provide food, shelter, and basic necessities. The denial was not temporary or accidental; it formed a sustained pattern of neglect that undermined the survivor's dignity and wellbeing.

Social norms often frame maintenance disputes as “minor marital disagreements” or matters to be endured quietly. This context discourages women from seeking redress and allows economic abuse to persist unchecked.

**Replication Tip:**

Always assess **economic deprivation** as potential VAWG. Poverty alone is not the issue—**failure to fulfil obligation** is.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor (Hadiza Abubakar)	Rights holder denied maintenance	Central
Husband (Nura Muhammad)	Perpetrator of economic neglect	High
Shari'a Court (Khadi)	Judicial authority	High
Family members	Informal pressure and mediation	Medium
Community	Norm-setting environment	Medium
CSO (indirect)	Legal awareness / referral support	Medium

### Why this mapping mattered:

It clarified that **maintenance is a legal obligation**, not a negotiable family matter, and that judicial authority was required to enforce compliance.

## 3. INCIDENT SUMMARY

The survivor filed a complaint before the Shari'a Court alleging that her husband had **failed to provide maintenance**, leaving her without adequate food, support, or financial security. Despite the subsistence of the marriage, the husband abdicated his responsibilities, effectively transferring the burden of survival onto the survivor.

Informal efforts to resolve the matter failed. The husband did not deny the marriage but resisted fulfilling his obligations, relying on social norms that tolerate women's economic suffering within marriage.

The survivor, therefore, sought judicial intervention to restore her rights and dignity.

## 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Islamic law treats **maintenance (*nafaqa*) as a binding obligation**, not an act of goodwill.

Key principles applied include:

- **Qur'an 2:233**  
Establishes the obligation of fathers/husbands to provide for mothers and dependents in a fair manner.
- **Qur'an 65:7**

Requires men to spend according to their means and prohibits deliberate deprivation.

- **La darar wa la dirar**

Denial of maintenance constitutes harm, particularly when it exposes a woman to hunger, insecurity, and humiliation.

- **Maliki jurisprudence on *darar***

Sustained failure to provide maintenance qualifies as actionable harm and can justify judicial remedy, including enforcement or dissolution.

The court affirmed that **economic neglect is not morally neutral**. It is a violation of Islamic justice and family responsibility.

**Replication Tip:**

Use Qur'anic obligation language (*wājib*, *fard*) when framing maintenance cases—this strengthens legitimacy and enforcement.

## 5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION (HOW CHANGE HAPPENED)

This case followed a **clear judicial accountability pathway**:

1. Survivor filed a formal complaint at the Shari'a Court
2. The court established the validity of marriage
3. Evidence of maintenance neglect was assessed
4. Judicial reasoning applied the Islamic obligations of *nafaqa*
5. The court recognised neglect as *darar*
6. Legal accountability is imposed on the husband

**Why this process worked:**

The court treated maintenance as an **enforceable duty**, not a private marital arrangement.

## 6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

**Survivor Voice (Anonymised):**

“I was told many times to manage. The court made it clear that providing for me was his duty in Islam.”

**Key outcomes:**

1. Maintenance denial is formally recognised as harm
2. Survivor's economic dignity affirmed
3. Legal precedent reinforcing *nafaqa* obligations
4. A clear message that economic violence is punishable

## 7. SUCCESS FACTORS

1. Strong judicial grounding in Qur'anic obligations
2. Clear differentiation between poverty and neglect
3. Survivor's willingness to pursue formal justice
4. Faith-legitimate reasoning accepted by the community

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

BARRIER	RESPONSE
Normalisation of economic neglect	Framed as <i>haram</i> harm
Pressure to endure	Judicial enforcement
Misunderstanding of <i>nafaqa</i>	Clarified as an obligation
Survivor's fear of stigma	Court validation

### Replication Tip:

Judicial clarity reduces stigma by shifting blame from the survivor to the obligation-holder.

## 9. Replication Checklist (For CSOs and Courts)

1. Treat maintenance denial as VAWG
2. Distinguish inability from refusal
3. Use Qur'anic and fiqh-based obligations
4. Document duration and impact of neglect
5. Support survivors through filing and hearings

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. Economic violence is a core form of VAWG
2. Maintenance is a religious duty, not charity
3. Courts play a critical role in correcting normalised neglect

### Recommendations

1. Train judges and CSOs on *nafaqa* enforcement
2. Integrate economic violence into VAWG frameworks
3. Expand community awareness on Islamic maintenance obligations
4. Strengthen post-judgment monitoring for compliance

## CASE STUDY 5

### FCT (Abaji, Abuja) | Marital Harm (*Darar*) and Breakdown of Conjugal Obligations | Shari'a Court-Led Dissolution (*Fasakh*)

#### CASE SNAPSHOT

**1. Type of VAWG:**

Marital harm (*darar*), emotional abuse, neglect, breakdown of conjugal obligations

**2. Primary Institution:**

Shari'a Court, Abaji Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

**3. Faith Actors Involved:**

Shari'a Court judge (Khadi); Islamic legal principles applied through judicial reasoning

**4. Outcome:**

Judicial dissolution of marriage (*fasakh*) granted on grounds of harm; the survivor is released from a damaging marital relationship with faith-legitimate justification

#### 1. Background and Context

This case illustrates how **marriage can become a site of sustained harm even in the absence of extreme physical violence**, and how Islamic law provides remedies when the core objectives of marriage are undermined.

The survivor was legally married under Islamic law, but lived in a relationship marked by:

- Persistent neglect of marital responsibilities
- Emotional distress and instability
- Absence of care, protection, and companionship

Despite the outward existence of marriage, its **substantive obligations had collapsed**. Social expectations within the community nonetheless pressured the survivor to remain in the relationship, framing marital endurance as a religious virtue and discouraging escalation to formal institutions.

The Abaji context, like many semi-urban and rural settings, places strong emphasis on reconciliation and family mediation. While such mechanisms can be useful, in this case, they failed to address the underlying harm.

#### Replication Tip:

Do not equate the *existence* of marriage with its *valid functioning*. Islamic law evaluates substance, not form.

## 2. STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor	The rights holder experiencing marital harm	Central
Husband	Source of neglect and harm	High
Family elders	Informal mediators	Medium
Community members	Reinforced endurance norms	Medium
Shari'a Court (Abaji)	Judicial authority	High
CSO (indirect)	Legal information/referral	Medium

### Why this mapping mattered:

It showed that **informal mediation had exhausted its usefulness** and that only judicial authority could restore justice and dignity.

## 3. INCIDENT SUMMARY (WHAT HAPPENED)

Over time, the survivor experienced a steady breakdown of marital obligations. The husband failed to provide emotional support, care, and responsible companionship, creating a living situation defined by distress rather than tranquillity.

Attempts at informal resolution did not result in meaningful change. The survivor remained in a harmful situation that undermined her well-being and dignity. Eventually, she sought redress through the Shari'a Court in Abaji, requesting relief from the marriage on grounds of harm (*darar*).

## 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS (WHY INTERVENTION WAS LEGITIMATE)

Islamic jurisprudence recognises **harm (*darar*) as a valid and sufficient ground for judicial dissolution.**

Key principles applied include:

- **Qur'an 30:21**  
Marriage is intended to create tranquillity (*sakinah*), affection, and mercy. When these are absent and replaced by distress, the objective of marriage is defeated.
- **La darar wa la dirar**

Sustained neglect and emotional harm fall squarely within the prohibition of harm.

- **Qur'an 2:231**  
Warns against maintaining marital ties in ways that cause harm or injustice.
- **Maliki jurisprudence on *fasakh***  
Allows a judge to dissolve a marriage when harm is established, and reconciliation has failed.

The court affirmed that **forcing continuation of a harmful marriage contradicts Islamic justice**, and that dissolution in such circumstances is a protective, not destructive, act.

### **Replication Tip:**

Frame *fasakh* as a **protective Islamic remedy**, not a failure of marriage or faith.

## **5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION**

The intervention followed a **structured judicial pathway**:

1. Survivor endured persistent harm and neglect
2. Informal mediation was attempted and failed
3. Survivor approached the Shari'a Court in Abaji
4. The court assessed evidence of harm and the breakdown of obligations
5. Islamic legal principles of non-harm applied
6. Judicial discretion exercised under Maliki jurisprudence
7. Marriage dissolved through *fasakh*

### **Why this process worked:**

The court prioritised **substantive justice and dignity** over social pressure to preserve marriage at all costs.

## **6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES**

### **Survivor Voice:**

“I was afraid that asking for dissolution meant disobeying Allah. The court showed me that Islam does not require suffering.”

### **Key outcomes:**

- Marriage dissolved on faith-legitimate grounds
- Survivor released from ongoing harm
- Restoration of dignity and personal autonomy
- Clear institutional signal that harm overrides endurance

## **7. SUCCESS FACTORS**

- Judicial willingness to recognise non-physical harm

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

- Clear application of Islamic legal principles
- Survivor courage to seek formal redress
- Recognition that reconciliation had failed

BARRIER	RESPONSE
Pressure to reconcile	The court prioritised safety and justice
Misunderstanding of <i>fasakh</i>	Clarified as an Islamic remedy
Fear of religious wrongdoing	Faith-based judicial explanation
Lack of visible injury	Focus on cumulative harm

- **Replication Tip:**
- Judicial explanation is as important as judicial outcome—clarity reduces stigma.

## 9. REPLICATION CHECKLIST (FOR CSOS AND COURTS)

- Recognise neglect and emotional harm as *darar*
- Document the failure of informal mediation
- Apply Islamic objectives of marriage, not cultural norms
- Use *fasakh* where harm persists
- Support survivors through faith-based clarification

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. Harm can exist even when marriage formally continues
2. Endurance is not an Islamic obligation in the face of injustice
3. *Fasakh* is a legitimate protection mechanism

### Recommendations

1. Train judges and CSOs on identifying *darar* beyond physical violence
2. Increase community awareness of lawful dissolution under Islam
3. Strengthen referral pathways from mediation to courts
4. Document *fasakh* cases for advocacy and learning

## CASE STUDY 6

### FCT (Abaji, Abuja) | Economic & Emotional Violence Through Neglect | Shari'a Court–Led Protection of Dignity and Maintenance Rights

#### CASE SNAPSHOT

- **Type of VAWG:**  
Economic violence, emotional abuse, denial of maintenance (*nafaqa*), neglect
- **Primary Institution:**  
Shari'a Court, Abaji Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT)
- **Faith Actors Involved:**  
Shari'a Court judge (Khadi); Islamic legal principles applied through judicial reasoning
- **Outcome:**  
Judicial recognition of neglect as *darar*; survivor's right to maintenance affirmed; dignity and economic security prioritised

#### 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This case demonstrates how **economic and emotional violence often operate together**, reinforcing women's vulnerability within marriage. The survivor remained legally married, yet lived in conditions of neglect where her basic needs were unmet, and her emotional wellbeing consistently undermined.

In the Abaji context, denial of maintenance is frequently normalised, especially where husbands claim hardship or rely on cultural assumptions that women should “manage” regardless of deprivation. Emotional neglect—withdrawal of care, attention, and responsibility—is rarely named as violence, even though its effects are cumulative and severe.

The survivor initially endured the situation in silence, constrained by stigma and fear of being labelled disobedient. Over time, the sustained neglect affected her dignity, stability, and sense of worth, prompting escalation to formal justice mechanisms.

#### REPLICATION TIP:

Economic neglect should always be assessed alongside emotional harm. Together, they constitute a powerful form of coercive control.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Actor	Role	Influence
Survivor	The rights holder denied maintenance and care	Central
Husband	Perpetrator of neglect	High
Family members	Informal pressure to endure	Medium
Community	Normalised deprivation	Medium
Shari'a Court (Abaji)	Judicial authority	High
CSO (indirect)	Legal information and referral	Medium

### Why this mapping mattered:

It clarified that deprivation was not accidental or temporary, but **systemic**, requiring judicial enforcement rather than mediation.

## 3. INCIDENT SUMMARY (WHAT HAPPENED)

The survivor reported that her husband consistently failed to provide:

- Adequate food and household support
- Financial resources for basic needs
- Emotional care and responsible presence

This neglect persisted despite the continuation of the marriage and repeated informal appeals. The husband neither formally dissolved the marriage nor fulfilled his obligations, leaving the survivor in a state of dependency and uncertainty.

The emotional impact of neglect was profound. The survivor described feelings of abandonment, humiliation, and insecurity. Eventually, she sought redress through the Shari'a Court in Abaji to restore her rights and dignity.

## 4. FAITH AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

Islamic law treats **maintenance and care as enforceable obligations**, not discretionary acts.

Key principles applied include:

- **Qur'an 2:233**  
Establishes the obligation of fathers and husbands to provide maintenance in a fair

manner.

- **Qur'an 65:7**  
Requires provision according to means and condemns deliberate deprivation.
- **La darar wa la dirar**  
Sustained neglect that exposes a woman to hardship and emotional distress constitutes harm.
- **Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah**  
Protection of dignity, well-being, and family stability requires intervention where deprivation persists.

The court distinguished between genuine inability and **wilful neglect**, affirming that failure to provide without justification is *haram* harm.

### **Replication Tip:**

Always document the duration and impact of neglect to establish *darar* clearly.

## **5. PROCESS OF INTERVENTION (HOW CHANGE HAPPENED)**

The intervention followed a **rights-enforcement pathway**:

1. Survivor endured prolonged neglect and emotional harm
2. Informal attempts at resolution failed
3. Survivor approached the Shari'a Court in Abaji
4. The court assessed evidence of maintenance denial and emotional neglect
5. Islamic legal obligations of *nafaqa* applied
6. Neglect recognised as *darar*
7. Judicial directives issued to protect survivors' rights

### **Why this process worked:**

The court refused to normalise deprivation and treated maintenance as a **legal duty**, not a private arrangement.

## **6. RESULTS AND OUTCOMES**

### **Survivor Voice (Anonymised):**

“I thought being provided for was kindness. The court explained it is my right in Islam.”

### **Key outcomes:**

- Maintenance denial recognised as harm
- Survivor's economic dignity affirmed
- Clear judicial signal against neglect
- Emotional harm validated

## 7. SUCCESS FACTORS

- Clear judicial interpretation of *nafaqa*
- Recognition of the emotional impact of economic violence
- Survivor's willingness to seek justice
- Faith-legitimate framing is accepted by the community

## 8. BARRIERS AND HOW THEY WERE ADDRESSED

BARRIER	RESPONSE
Normalisation of neglect	Judicial clarification of obligation
Pressure to endure	Rights based Islamic reasoning
Lack of documentation	Survivor testimony accepted
Emotional harm minimised	Treated as cumulative <i>darar</i>

- **Replication Tip:**

Naming neglect as harm shifts responsibility from survivor to perpetrator.

## 9. REPLICATION CHECKLIST (FOR CSOS AND COURTS)

1. Treat economic neglect as VAWG
2. Distinguish inability from refusal
3. Document duration and effects of neglect
4. Apply Qur'anic obligations in judgments
5. Validate emotional harm alongside economic loss

## 10. KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Lessons

1. Economic violence often operates invisibly
2. Emotional harm intensifies economic deprivation
3. Courts can correct normalised neglect

### Recommendations

1. Strengthen judicial enforcement of maintenance orders
2. Integrate emotional abuse into economic violence analysis
3. Train CSOs and courts on documenting neglect
4. Increase community awareness of *nafaqa* as a right

## WHAT THESE CASE STUDIES SHOW

Taken together, the cases in this study reveal consistent patterns about how violence against women and girls operates within family and faith-influenced contexts and what actually works to stop it.

### 1. VIOLENCE IS SUSTAINED BY SILENCE, NOT BY FAITH

Across all cases, violence persisted longest where silence, stigma, and social pressure discouraged disclosure. Women did not remain in harmful situations because they lacked agency, but because speaking out carried social, economic, and spiritual risk. In contrast, once harm was named and legitimised—especially within faith-consistent frameworks—survivors were more willing and able to seek protection.

The cases demonstrate clearly that Islam itself is not the barrier. Harm is sustained by misinterpretation, selective use of religious language, and community norms that prioritise endurance over safety.

### 2. HARM IS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND OFTEN NON-PHYSICAL

Only a minority of cases involved visible physical violence alone. Most involved layered harm: emotional abuse, psychological distress, reputational damage, economic neglect, coercive control, sexual coercion, and post-marital harassment. These forms of violence were often treated as “minor” or “private,” yet their cumulative impact was severe.

The cases show that when institutions recognise harm (*darar*) broadly—not only as physical injury—protection becomes possible earlier, before violence escalates to life-threatening levels.

### 3. SURVIVORS SEEK JUSTICE WHEN PATHWAYS ARE CREDIBLE AND PROTECTIVE

A consistent finding across cases is that survivors engage with justice systems when they believe they will be protected rather than punished. Where survivors received accompaniment, shielding from intimidation, and clear faith-legitimate justification for protection, they persisted—even in the face of power imbalance and pressure to withdraw.

This challenges narratives that women are unwilling to pursue justice. The issue is not willingness; it is whether systems feel safe, fair, and legitimate.

#### **4. FAITH-BASED LEGITIMATION IS A TURNING POINT**

In several cases, the decisive shift occurred when Islamic principles were explicitly invoked to justify protection. Fatwas, clerical guidance, or judicial reasoning grounded in non-harm, dignity, and justice neutralised pressure for silence or compromise and countered narratives that demanded patience in the face of abuse.

Faith-based legitimation did not delay justice—it accelerated it by aligning protection with moral authority that communities recognise and respect.

#### **5. SHARI'A COURTS CAN FUNCTION AS PROTECTIVE INSTITUTIONS**

Where harm was clearly framed and supported, Shari'a courts issued rulings that prioritised safety, dignity, maintenance, separation, and accountability. The cases demonstrate that Shari'a courts are not inherently reconciliatory at all costs; when harm is established, they can and do support protective outcomes.

However, the effectiveness of court decisions depends heavily on enforcement and follow-up. Without sustained support, legal recognition alone is not always sufficient to secure lasting protection.

#### **6. PROTECTION IS A PROCESS, NOT A SINGLE EVENT**

The cases show that protection rarely happens through one action alone. It is produced through sequences: disclosure, reframing of harm, legitimation, accompaniment, institutional engagement, and post-decision support. Where any part of this chain was missing, survivors remained vulnerable—even after legal victories.

This underscores that replication requires systems, not isolated interventions.

#### **7. POST-MARITAL AND POST-JUDGMENT VIOLENCE REMAIN BLIND SPOTS**

Several cases reveal that harm often continues after divorce or judgment, through reputational attacks, economic deprivation, or institutional harassment. These forms of violence are poorly recognised in many protection frameworks, yet they significantly undermine survivor safety and recovery.

The cases make clear that protection must extend beyond marital status and beyond the courtroom.

#### **8. RECOVERY AND STABILITY ARE PART OF JUSTICE**

Where survivors received support beyond legal resolution, such as livelihood assistance, protection from retaliation, or psychosocial support, outcomes were more durable. Recovery

reduced vulnerability to repeat harm and strengthened survivors' ability to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Justice, in practice, includes safety, stability, and the ability to move forward, not only rulings or sanctions.

## OVERALL INSIGHT

These case studies demonstrate that effective responses to violence against women and girls in faith-influenced contexts are possible when protection is framed as a moral, legal, and religious obligation. When Islamic principles are applied with clarity and courage, they do not excuse harm—they expose it, delegitimise it, and demand accountability.

What fails women is not faith, but silence, stigma, and weak protection systems. What protects them is legitimacy, accompaniment, and institutions willing to act on the principle that harm must not be endured.

### WHY THIS MODEL WORKS

The cases in this study demonstrate a protection model that is effective because it aligns legitimacy, process, and survivor safety. Rather than treating faith as an obstacle, the model works by activating Islamic principles that communities already recognise as authoritative. This alignment removes the false tension between religion and women's rights and replaces it with a shared moral and legal framework for protection.

First, the model works because it **names harm clearly and early**. Across the cases, violence was addressed not only when it became physically severe, but also when it appeared as emotional abuse, neglect, coercive control, reputational harm, or sexual coercion. By recognising *darar* in its full sense, the model prevents escalation and validates survivor experience before harm becomes irreversible.

Second, the model works because it **builds legitimacy at the point of intervention**. Survivors were more likely to persist when protection was justified using Islamic principles of justice, dignity, and non-harm. Clerical guidance, Shari'a court reasoning, and faith-based institutional clarification neutralised stigma and countered narratives that demand silence or endurance. Legitimacy reduced resistance, weakened compromise pressures, and increased community acceptance of protective outcomes.

Third, the model works because it treats **protection as a process, not an event**. In the documented cases, meaningful outcomes emerged through sequences—disclosure, reframing of harm, accompaniment, institutional engagement, and follow-up—not through single actions. Where accompaniment and shielding were present, survivors navigated systems more safely and effectively. Where they were absent, harm persisted even after formal decisions.

Finally, the model works because it **centres dignity alongside justice**. For many survivors, justice was not only a judgment or sanction, but the restoration of safety, clarity, and moral certainty. By integrating faith-based clarification, legal action, and recovery support, the model

produced outcomes that survivors themselves recognised as just and sustainable.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Violence against women persists not because of faith, but because harm is silenced or misinterpreted.
2. Islamic principles provide a strong and legitimate foundation for protection when applied correctly.
3. Survivors seek justice when pathways are credible, protective, and faith-legitimate.
4. Non-physical violence—emotional, economic, psychological, sexual—must be recognised as actionable harm.
5. Civil society accompaniment is a critical safeguard in faith and justice systems.
6. Shari'a courts and faith institutions can function as protective mechanisms when non-harm and dignity are prioritised.
7. Protection must extend beyond divorce and beyond the courtroom to be durable.
8. Recovery and stability are integral to justice, not optional add-ons.

## CONCLUSION

This case study closes with a clear affirmation: ending violence against women and girls in faith-influenced contexts is possible, practical, and legitimate. The ten cases documented here show that when Islamic principles are applied with clarity and courage, they do not excuse harm—they expose it, delegitimise it, and demand accountability.

The model demonstrated in these cases challenges dominant assumptions. It shows that survivors are not unwilling to seek justice, that faith-based institutions are not inherently barriers, and that protection does not require abandoning religious frameworks. Instead, it requires reclaiming them.

At its core, this model works because it restores the original purpose of faith and law: to protect life, dignity, and justice. Where silence once prevailed, clarity is possible. Where endurance was demanded, protection can be justified. And where harm was normalised, accountability can be enforced.

This case study stands as evidence that compassion and protection are not external to Islam—they are central to it. When aligned with survivor-centred practice and institutional accountability, they form a powerful pathway toward ending violence against women and girls.

## About WRAPA

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) is a Nigerian women's rights organisation committed to promoting the dignity, protection, and rights of women and girls through legal advocacy, faith-consistent engagement, and community-based interventions. WRAPA works across legal, religious, and policy spaces to address Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and advance gender justice in culturally grounded ways.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION

### OFFICE ADDRESS:

Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)  
No 31 A.E Ekukinam Street, Utako Abuja

✉ [info@wrapanigeri.org](mailto:info@wrapanigeri.org)  
[wrap399@gmail.com](mailto:wrap399@gmail.com)

🌐 [www.wrapanigeria.org](http://www.wrapanigeria.org)