



# VAWG PREVENTION BASELINE STUDY

*Evolving Trends:  
'New Wine in Old Wineskins'*

2025



Supported by: **Ford Foundation**

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# **VAWG Prevention Baseline Study**

## **Evolving Trends: 'New Wine in Old Wineskins'**

2025

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## **VAWG PREVENTION BASELINE STUDY**

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We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of community-based organisations, faith leaders, women’s rights organisations, and government officials who participated in focus group discussions and key informant interviews, and who supported access to communities and institutions. Their engagement enriched the depth and relevance of the findings.

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## PREFACE

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) remains one of the most persistent human rights challenges in Nigeria, cutting across geographic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic contexts. Despite increased advocacy, policy reforms, and programmatic interventions, violence continues to manifest in evolving forms, often reinforced by deeply entrenched social norms, economic vulnerability, and institutional gaps.

This report, *VAWG Prevention Baseline Study: Evolving Trends – “New Wine in Old Wineskins”*, presents findings from a multi-state study conducted in August 2024 across ten Nigerian states in the North-West, North-East, and North-Central zones. The study employed desk reviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews to examine patterns and drivers of VAWG, assess the availability and effectiveness of prevention and protection services, identify gaps in response mechanisms, and establish a baseline for strengthening future interventions. It also reflects on the outcomes and learning from WRAPA previous initiatives to advance women’s rights.

The metaphor “new wine in old wineskins” captures a central insight of this study: while new laws, programmes, and advocacy efforts aimed at preventing VAWG are emerging, they are often implemented within long-standing cultural, traditional, and institutional systems that resist transformation. As a result, innovative strategies risk being constrained or undermined if the broader social structures that sustain violence remain unaddressed.

Findings from the study reveal that rape and domestic violence remain the most prevalent forms of VAWG across the study locations, with survivors often experiencing violence in both private and public spaces, including markets, motor parks, slum settlements, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The research highlights how cultural norms, economic hardship, limited sexual and rights education, weak service coordination, and gaps in law enforcement, particularly around the implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act, continue to expose women and girls to harm and limit access to justice.

At the same time, the study identifies opportunities for change, including the role of community-based reporting mechanisms, safe spaces, media advocacy, economic empowerment initiatives, and education, particularly for girls, as critical entry points for prevention. The report emphasises the need for a multi-faceted, system-strengthening approach that combines legal reform, institutional capacity building, community engagement, and sustained public awareness.

This baseline study is intended to serve as a learning and accountability tool for policymakers, practitioners, civil society organisations, donors, and advocates working to prevent VAWG in Nigeria. By documenting both persistent challenges and emerging opportunities, it provides an evidence base to inform more coordinated, context-responsive, and transformative efforts to advance the safety, dignity, and rights of women and girls.

## ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Meaning
<b>ABC</b>	Action on Body Confidence (NGO)
<b>AREWA</b>	Regional reference (Northern Nigeria identity/context)
<b>CBOs</b>	Community-Based Organizations
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women
<b>CERSDOV</b>	Center for Study and Resolution of Domestic Violence
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>DNA</b>	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
<b>FCT</b>	Federal Capital Territory
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussions
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>FIDA</b>	International Federation of Women Lawyers
<b>FSUs</b>	Family Support Units
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IDIs</b>	In-Depth Interviews
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>IFL</b>	Islamic Family Law
<b>INGOs</b>	International Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate Partner Violence
<b>KIIs</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>LGAs</b>	Local Government Areas
<b>NAPTIP</b>	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ODK</b>	Open Data Kit
<b>SARC</b>	Sexual Assault Referral Center
<b>SESVOC</b>	Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Violence Outreach Centre

<b>STIs</b>	Sexually Transmitted Infections
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>VAPP</b>	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition)
<b>VAPPA</b>	Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WRAPA</b>	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative
<b>WROs</b>	Women's Rights Organisations

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# Executive Summary

This study, commissioned by the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) under the Ford Foundation Build Grant, was conducted across ten Nigerian states. These include seven North-Western states (Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara), two North-Eastern states (Borno, Gombe), and one North-Central state (Niger). In August 2024, the research used desk reviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews to gather data from a range of stakeholders. Participants included community-based organizations, faith leaders, women's rights organizations, and government officials. The study aimed to identify trends and patterns of violence against women and girls (VAWG), assess the availability and effectiveness of protection and prevention services, uncover gaps in these services, and set a baseline for improving them. Additionally, it evaluated the impact of WRAPA previous initiatives on advancing women's rights.

The study revealed that violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a pervasive issue across the surveyed Nigerian states, with rape and domestic violence identified as the most prevalent forms. Cultural and traditional norms, deeply embedded in society, play a significant role in perpetuating these acts of violence, often justifying or downplaying their severity. Economic hardships further exacerbate the problem, leaving many women financially dependent and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The lack of sexual education and awareness among women and girls contributes to their rights violation. High-risk areas identified include public spaces such as markets and motor parks, as well as slum areas and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where safety is often compromised. Perpetrators of these acts are frequently known to the survivors, including family members and neighbors, and societal pressures often compel survivors to remain silent.

Despite the presence of various organizations offering support services like Safe Spaces and legal aid, significant challenges hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Survivors are often reluctant to report incidents due to fears of stigmatization and retribution, and awareness about available services is generally low, especially in rural and underserved areas. The lack of coordination among support mechanisms further weakens the overall response to VAWG. In addition, corruption and limited expertise among service providers undermine the quality of care and justice provided to survivors. The study also found that the enforcement of protective laws, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act, faces numerous obstacles, including cultural resistance, lack of enforcement, and issues with local jurisdiction, leaving many women and girls without adequate protection.

To effectively address these challenges, the study recommends a multi-faceted approach focused on strengthening legal and protection mechanisms. This includes training law enforcement officers and judicial personnel to handle VAWG cases with sensitivity and efficiency, thereby ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable. Establishing specialized courts dedicated to handling VAWG cases can help expedite legal processes and provide timely justice. Additionally, community-based reporting systems, such as confidential helplines and safe spaces, should be developed to encourage survivors to come forward without fear of stigmatization or retribution. Public awareness campaigns, leveraging media platforms, should be intensified to educate communities about VAWG and the available support services.

Economic empowerment and education are crucial components of the recommended strategy. Supporting women's small businesses through financial assistance, training, and mentorship can enhance their economic independence, reducing their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Promoting girls' education is vital for breaking the cycle of dependency and abuse; therefore, efforts should be made to provide scholarships and other incentives that encourage school attendance. Community engagement programs should also be implemented to change perceptions

about the importance of girls' education, involving parents, guardians, and local leaders. By continuing and expanding media campaigns, such as the successful "Mata a Yau" program, WRAPA and its partners can effectively raise awareness and advocate for women's rights, contributing to a safer and more equitable environment for women and girls in Nigeria. The study emphasizes the urgent need to enhance capacity and resilience for advancing women's rights in Nigeria. Prioritizing legal reforms, economic empowerment, education, and awareness campaigns can significantly reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing these targeted recommendations, WRAPA and its partners can create a safer, more inclusive environment for Nigerian women and girls.

# Section One: Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a pervasive global pandemic affecting 1 in 3 women in their lifetime, with 35% of women worldwide experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner, and as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. Additionally, 200 million women have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)/cutting. This devastating issue not only impacts survivors and their families but also incurs significant social and economic costs, with violence against women costing some countries up to 3.7% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), more than double the typical government expenditure on education. The failure to address this violence has long-term repercussions, as numerous studies indicate that children exposed to violence are more likely to become survivors or perpetrators of violence in the future (World Bank Group 2019).



Notably, gender-based violence transcends social and economic boundaries, affecting women and girls across all socio-economic backgrounds, making it a critical issue to be addressed globally, in both developing and developed nations

## Understanding the Terminology

The term Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is often used interchangeably with the term Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The latter underlines that violence directed at and experienced by women and girls is a manifestation of gender inequalities and power relations. GBV is hence closely linked to women's subordinate position within families, communities, and states. The term GBV emphasizes that women and girls experience such violence because of their sex and in the context of these unequal gender relations. This is recognized in the understanding in Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) which states that GBV is a violence that is directed against women because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. Important to note is that GBV encapsulates forms of violence against both men and women deriving from unequal power relations and structures between men and women.

The term VAWG underlines that women and girls are the ones who most frequently experience violence, often perpetrated by men. VAWG is a global issue of concern. Despite efforts over the years, it continues to be prevalent in Nigeria, manifesting in various forms, including intimate partner violence and abuse, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) child marriage, rape, sexual harassment, and cyber bullying (Onyemelukwe 2021).

The fight to end violence against women and girls is universal. However, gender inequality—the root cause of violence against women and girls—is particularly prevalent in regions affected by crises including conflict, military coups, displacement, climate shocks, and hunger. Crises accelerate the underlying causes of violence against women and girls, including the denigration of public services and social networks that typically offer support. An International Rescue Committee (IRC) report found that 1 in 5 women and girls have suffered sexual violence during crises. Women and girls of ethnic minorities face multiple forms of oppression, which further reduces their power and choice. They are at increased risk of violence and face barriers to accessing support (Rescue.ng 2024). This underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to combat GBV, addressing both immediate and root causes to protect and empower women and girls globally.

Since VAWG is a global social problem recorded in all spheres of the globe, the prevalence of VAWG cannot be overemphasized in Africa and Nigeria inclusive as the report released by the United Nations (UN 2020) indicates that 1,095 cases of gender-based violence in Nigeria during March and April lockdown were reported with states like Gombe, Katsina, Benue, Abia, Lagos and Rivers ranking highest based on geo-political zones. Even though the phenomena are on the

increase, the sensitive nature makes it under-reported and sometimes if reported, proving beyond reasonable doubt as required by law by the policing agents proves futile.

Currently, Nigeria's population of women and girls is estimated to be over 108 million and poverty rates pegged at about 69 percent. Women typically in hard-to-reach or underrepresented communities face the worst of the hardship and environmental and social ills that poverty brings. This trend is worsened by the fact that women in Nigeria have been historically and systematically shortchanged across all sectors and even more so in political representation when policies are being made that will affect their lives and livelihoods. In addition to political underrepresentation, the women in Nigeria face issues of sexual and gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, limited access to good education, and economic discrimination. The protection of women and girls against violence is a critical issue globally. Despite ongoing efforts, there are persistent gaps in prevention, protection, and response mechanisms. To address these gaps effectively, comprehensive research is required to identify current challenges and develop a new baseline for enhancing the safety and well-being of women and girls. The Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) has been instrumental in empowering women in Nigeria since its inception, with significant support from the MacArthur Foundation for its Islamic Family Law (IFL) project aimed at enhancing women's rights and access to justice in North-West Nigeria.

Leveraging existing institutions like the Khutbah and Hakamain systems, WRAPA project strategically engaged stakeholders and promoted advocacy, resulting in improved governance, institutional reforms, and

community systems, benefiting over 1.9 million women.

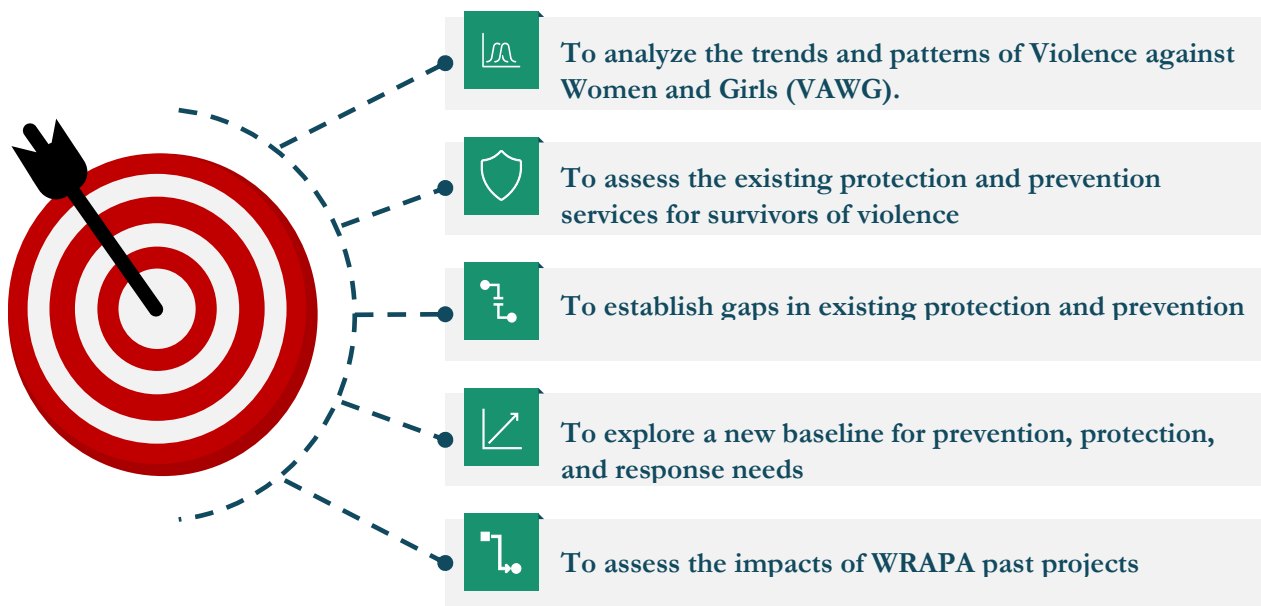
The project's success underscores the importance of stakeholder engagement, legal empowerment through landmark court judgments, and scaling impact to more states in Northern Nigeria, especially in remote communities, while emphasizing continued

collaboration for sustained reforms and women's empowerment within cultural and religious contexts. Based on this, this consultancy aims to conduct comprehensive research to identify the current gaps in the protection of women and girls against violence and to develop a new baseline of prevention, protection, and response needs.

## Core Purpose/Objective

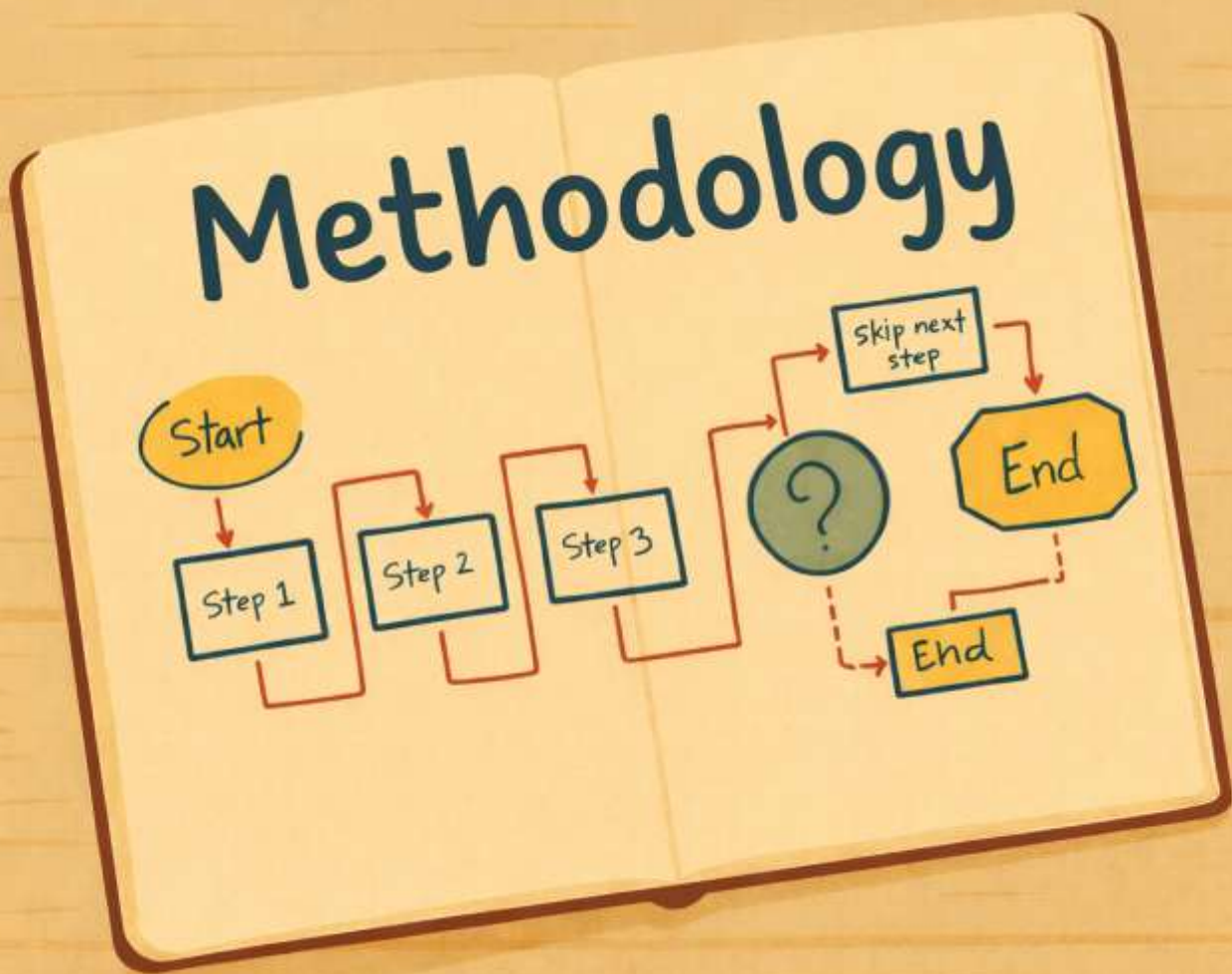
The core objective of this consultancy is to comprehensively identify current gaps in the protection of women and girls from violence to develop a new baseline of prevention, protection, and response needs.

The specific aims are:



## Scope of Work

The consultancy aimed to conduct a thorough review of existing literature, reports, and data related to violence against women and girls at local, national, and international levels in Seven North-Western States (*Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara*), Two North-Eastern States (*Borno, Gombe*) and One North-Central State (*Niger*).



## Section Two: Methodology

Noting the place of first-hand information in ascertaining the degree of relationships between variables and coupled with the nature of the problem to be studied, the study was participatory research employing qualitative techniques. This involved information generated from experts in the field of VAWG. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used to elicit information. Community residents, notable post-graduate, graduate students, experts in the field of VAWG, and lecturers with relevant experience in qualitative interview facilitation were recruited and trained as Research Assistants from each of the sampled states. Participants were mobilized with the assistants

of WRAPA state focal persons who served as contact persons to the Research Assistants. The Research Assistants were supervised and monitored by the WRAPA technical consultant to ensure successful and hitch-free field engagement.

### Instruments of Data Collection

A well-structured FGD and KII guides were administered to sampled participants. The instruments contained relevant questions on the study variables. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to freely express their views.

## Sampling Size

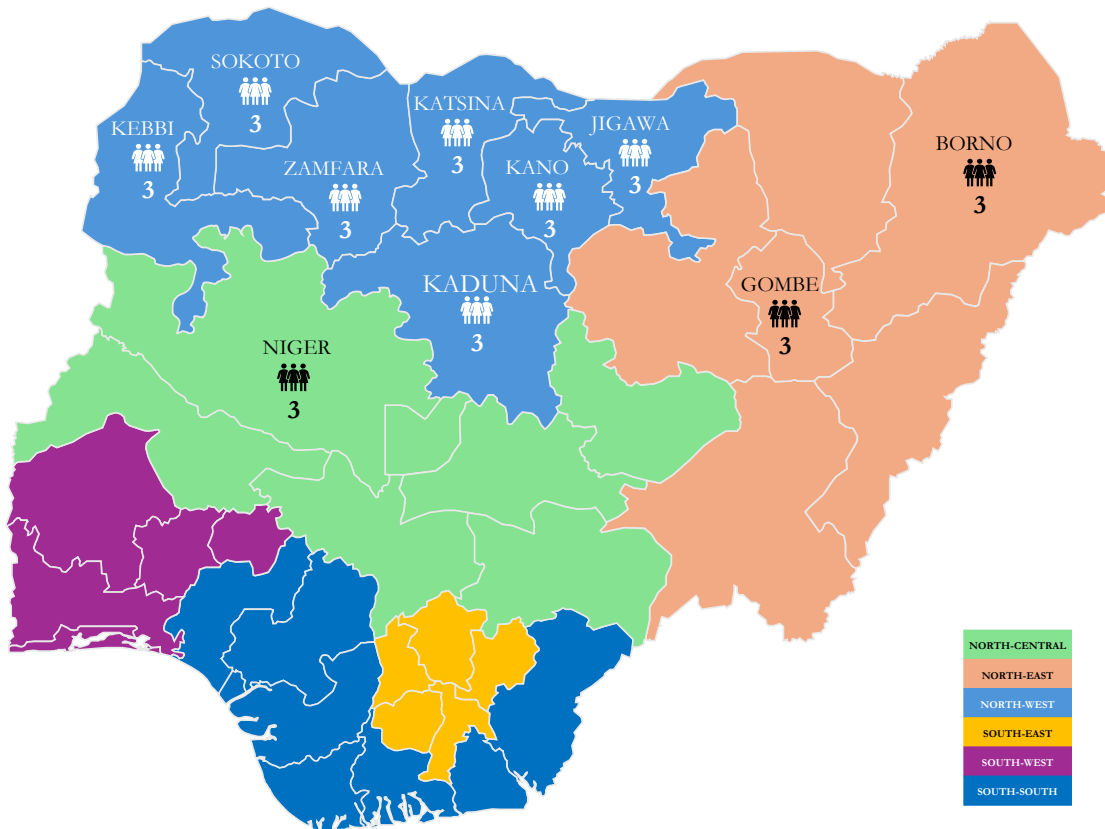
Since the consultancy focused on Strengthening Capacity and Resilience for Women’s Rights Advancement, stakeholders were sampled based on their knowledge and expertise in the area of VAWG. This is in recognition that addressing VAWG requires a collaborative effort from diverse stakeholders with specialized knowledge and expertise. Participants were drawn from ten (10) sampled states. Below is a distribution table for the scheduled interviews and the number of participants sampled in each state.

**Table 1: Distribution of Key Informant Interviews in each State**

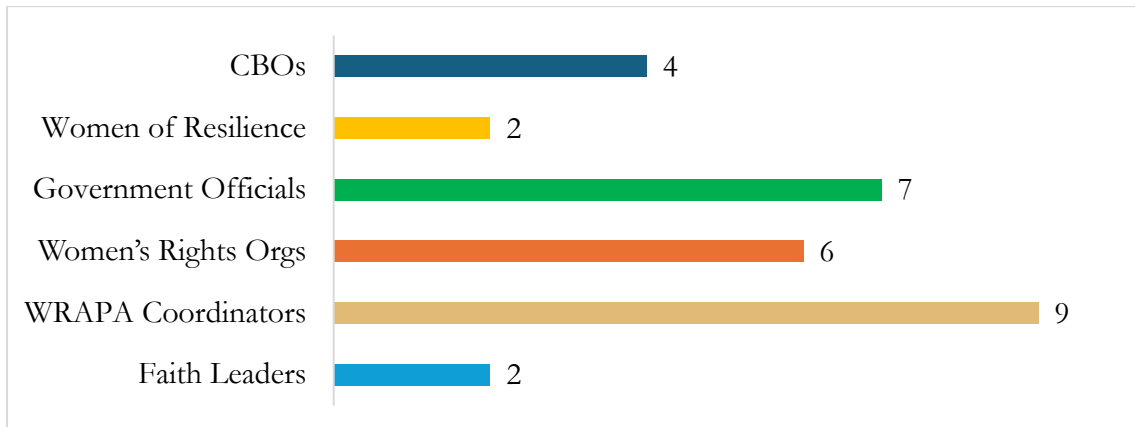
S/N	Geo-Political Zone	State	Stakeholders						
			Faith Leaders	WRAPA Coordinators	Women’s rights org.	Government Official	Women of Resilience	CBOs	TOTAL (Per State)
1.	North-West	Kaduna	-	1	1	1	-	-	3
2.		Kano	-	1	1	-	1	-	3
3.		Katsina	1	1	-	1	-	-	3
4.		Kebbi	-	1	1	-	-	1	3
5.		Sokoto	-	1	1	-	1	-	3
6.		Jigawa	-	1	-	1	-	1	3
7.		Zamfara	1	1	-	1	-	-	3
8.	North-Central	Niger	-	1	1	1	-	-	3
9.	North-East	Borno	-	-	1	1	-	1	3
10.		Gombe	-	1	-	1	-	1	3
GRAND TOTAL									30

In all, a total of 30 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted across the 10 sampled states. Three KIIs were conducted in each of the sampled states. The target population for the interviews were relevant stakeholders, including faith leaders, WRAPA coordinators, representatives of non-governmental organizations, especially partner women’s rights organizations with a faith-based focus, women of resilience, Community-Based Organizations, and representatives of relevant government agencies and ministries, like the Ministry of Women Affairs or Ministry of Humanitarian Services. In each of the sampled states, three out of the six identified stakeholders were selected and interviewed. This is to ensure all relevant stakeholders are interviewed.

### Summary of KIIs per State Across Geo-Political Zones



### Summary of KIIs by Stakeholders



**Table 2: Distribution of Focus Group Discussion with Adolescent girls and Women in each State**

S/N	Geo-Political Zone	State	No. of Participants (Adolescent Girls)	No. of Participants (Women)	Total Participants per Session	No. of Interviews (adolescent girls and women) per State
1.	North-West	Kaduna	6	6	12	1
2.		Kano	6	6	12	1
3.		Katsina	6	6	12	1
4.		Kebbi	6	6	12	1
5.		Sokoto	6	6	12	1
6.		Jigawa	6	6	12	1
7.		Zamfara	6	6	12	1
8.	North-Central	Niger	6	6	12	1
9.	North-East	Borno	6	6	12	1
10		Gombe	6	6	12	1
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>10</b>

In all, a total of 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across the ten sampled states. One FGD was conducted in each of the sampled states combining both adolescent girls and women. The target population for the discussion was representatives of adolescent girls and women in the sampled states. The sample size for the FGD session ranges between 10-12 participants per session. This is to ensure diverse perspectives on the subject matter are gained, facilitate meaningful interactions and discussions, and ensure richer and more accurate data is outsourced.

This study employs purely qualitative research design to explore a new baseline for ending VAWG. While quantitative data can provide valuable insights into the prevalence and trends of VAWG, it is limited in its ability to capture the complex and in-depth experiences of survivors, the underlying causes of violence, and the contextual factors that influence its perpetuation.

Quantitative data on the trends and prevalence of VAWG was typically obtained from reviewed literature and relevant organizations, even though it may provide a partial understanding of the issue. In addition, it often neglects the rich, contextual information that is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In contrast, employing qualitative research in this context allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of stakeholders, including survivors, activists, service providers, and CBOs.

## Sampling Technique

A purposive (judgmental) sampling technique was employed to select the participants. This method relies on the researcher's judgment and expertise to identify individuals who are best positioned to provide valuable insights into the advancement of women's rights. Purposive sampling was considered ideal for the study because it enables the selection of participants with the most relevant experiences and knowledge. The study aims to explore the capacity and resilience of women's rights

advocates, as well as the contextual factors influencing their work. By targeting individuals with demonstrated expertise and experience in the area, it ensures that the data collected is rich, relevant, and informative. Participants were drawn from various organizations, particularly Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) with a focus on gender-related or protection issues. Special attention was given to gender-based officers within these CBOs. Additionally, only individuals with substantial insights into gender-related issues were included in the sample. Contacts were established with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which provided the contact information of the representatives of CBOs in their respective states. It was these representatives of the CBOs that subsequently connected the research assistants with the relevant stakeholders.

## Analysis

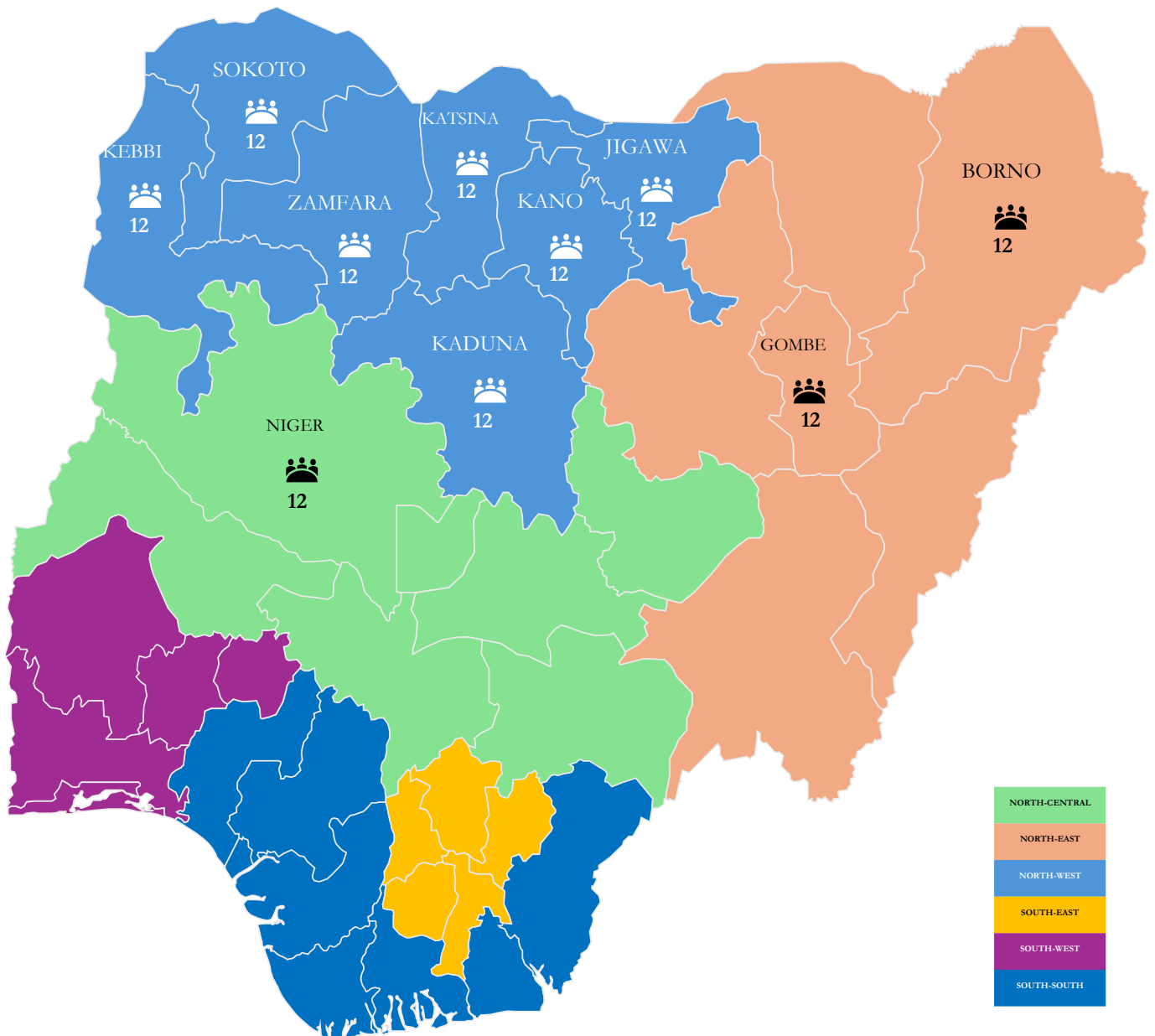
The analysis was based on its nature and form. The data were thematically analyzed while key themes were generated from the study findings. The findings generated from the desk review, KII, and FGD discussions were collated, analyzed, and integrated.

The study aims to explore the capacity and resilience of women's rights advocates...

## Ethical Considerations

All principles of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld in the conduct of the study. Inclusive criteria were adhered to by cutting across sampling all relevant actors and stakeholders; ethnicity and religion were not considered a barrier in the selection criteria. Informed consent was obtained and letters were distributed to relevant authorities, and stakeholders before advancement to the field

## Focal Group Discussions Locations



The target population for the discussions was representatives of adolescent girls and women in the sampled states.



## Section Three: Key Findings & Discussion

### **Socio-Demographic Patterns of Life and Challenges Faced by Women and Girls**

Based on the study findings, most women primarily spend and manage their time executing domestic duties, buying and selling goods such as grains and livestock, agricultural activities, teenage girls are enrolled in schooling, majority don't attend formal school but have prior knowledge of the importance of formal education. Few other women work in formal employment settings, such as offices. Upon marriage, in-laws exert significant influence over a woman's decision to work. They may impose restrictions based on cultural or traditional beliefs, which often prioritize domestic roles over professional ones. The husband's decision plays a crucial role in whether a woman can work. Many husbands

prefer their wives to stay at home or engage in home-based businesses rather than seek employment outside, often due to concerns about intermingling with men or maintaining the family's reputation. Even when parents allow their daughters to work, suitors may place conditions on marriage, requiring them to quit their jobs if they wish to marry. Some husbands support their wives engaging in business activities but within the confines of their homes. Certain types of work, such as security jobs, banking, company positions, and hospitality work, are deemed inappropriate for women in the focused states. These jobs are considered too risky, too public, or too interactive with

men, which conflicts with cultural norms about women's roles.

For marriage, parents, suitors, husband or in-laws may exert significant influence over a woman's decision to work and impose restrictions often prioritizing domestic over professional roles.

The findings suggest a diversity in economic activities among women, from informal sectors (housewives, small-scale trading) to formal employment as well as schooling among young girls. In addition, this implies a juxtaposition between traditional roles (housewives) and more modern roles (business and office work), which could point to an ongoing transition in societal norms regarding women's participation in the workforce. This has implications for the financial independence of women and their ability to contribute to household income, potentially reducing vulnerability to economic-based violence or exploitation. This is unconnected to the fact that access to education and skill development are critical in breaking cycles of poverty and dependency that often contribute to VAWG.

Some risky behaviors that expose women and girls to violence include parental negligence, peer influence, claims of 'improper dressing', financial deprivation, and hawking.

On the challenges faced by women and girls, the study findings showed a significant challenge related to the safety and freedom of movement for women and girls in some states like Kaduna, Niger, Kano, Katsina, and Zamfara State. In Kaduna State specifically, a group of youths are known to pose a threat to the safety of women and girls. This group restricts their movement and creates an environment of fear, particularly during certain times of the day, such as after Maghrib or Isha prayers.

### **Risky Behaviors that Expose Girls and Women to Violence**

There are several risky behaviors by either parents or guardians that expose women and girls to violence. Study findings identified these behaviors to include negligence on the part of the parent or guardian in providing the necessities of life to dependents, negligence of living children, especially girls with male neighbors while away from home, peer influence, improper dressing, financial deprivation, and sending female children to hawk. These factors combined expose women and teenage girls to violence.

### **Stigmatization and Stereotyping as a Challenge faced by Women and Girls**

The study discovered societal perceptions and stigmatization of girls residing in specific areas in the study areas. A typical example is girls found around *Sabon Layi* in Gombe State, and Bolori in Borno State, who are perceived as "irresponsible" or "bad" based on solely being seen in that environment. This reflects a strong stigma attached to their place of residence, leading to negative stereotyping. The girls' identity and perceived morality are unfairly shaped by the environment they are seen rather than their actions or character. This indicates a broader societal issue where people are judged not by their behavior but by where they live or are seen. The judgment placed on women and girls is specifically gendered, reflecting a double standard where women and girls are more harshly judged for perceived immorality or irresponsibility than their male counterparts.

In terms of the safety of women, most women feel safer within their home communities due to the presence of family, friends, and people they grew up with. This sense of safety is rooted in familiarity and social connections. It is noted that when women, particularly young girls, leave their familiar communities for other areas, especially slum areas, their safety is compromised. The unfamiliar environment increases their vulnerability to harassment and other forms of violence. Participants emphasize that a woman’s behavior, including how she dresses, the people she associates with, and the places she visits, can lead to harassment. This aligns with a victim-blaming perspective, where responsibility is placed on women for the actions of their harassers.

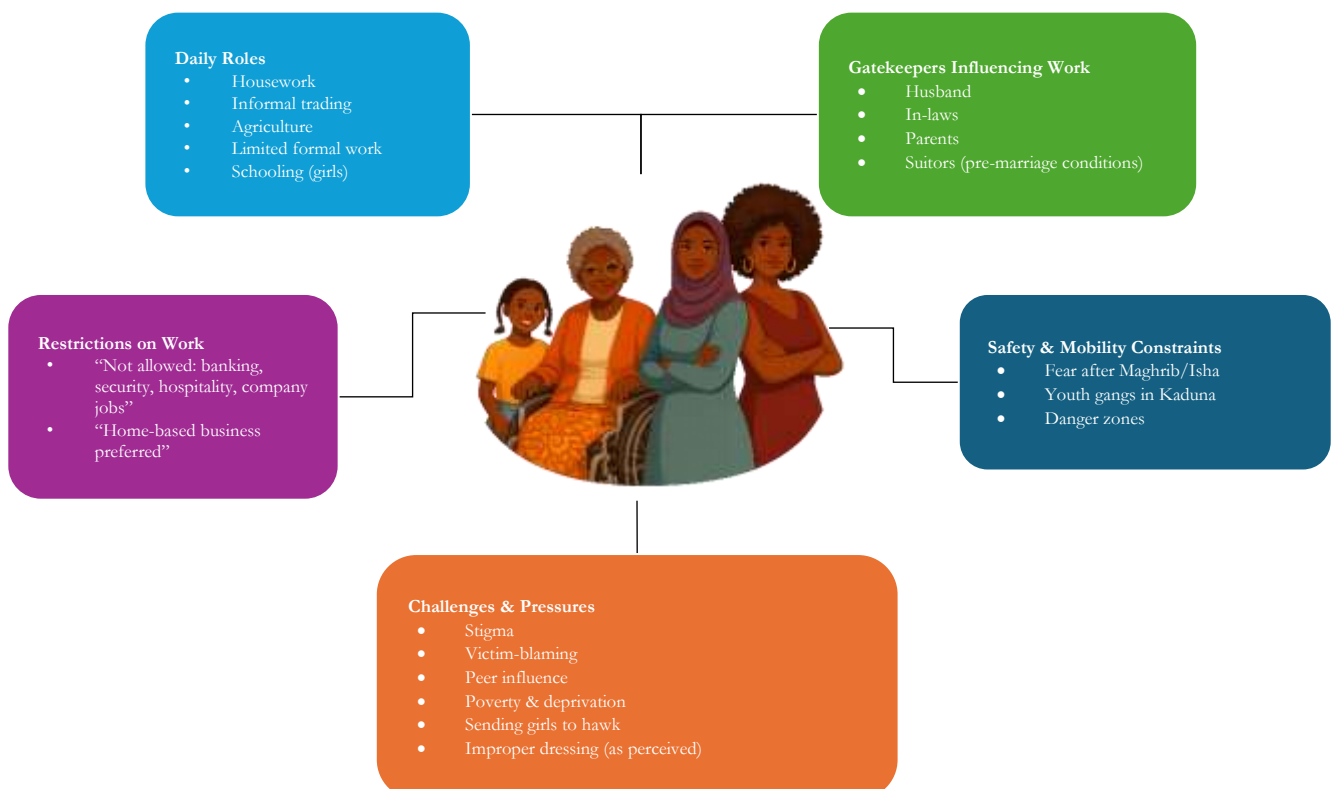
## Danger Zones for Women

Every community has areas that are recognized as danger zones. These are often places where illicit activities, such as drug use (e.g., smoking weed), occur, making them unsafe for women, girls, and children to frequent, especially alone. The risk associated with these danger zones is not constant but varies with the time of day.

Certain times, such as late evening or night, are more perilous due to reduced visibility, lower public presence, and the likelihood of encountering individuals involved in risky behaviors. Women and children, particularly when alone, are more susceptible to harm in these danger zones. The combination of being in a high-risk area and moving at dangerous times increases the likelihood of encountering violence or harassment.

In most of the States' studies, certain communities, zones, and areas are considered dangerous routes for women and girls. The study indicated the presence of danger zones in Kaduna State, particularly for women and girls. The distinction between the treatment of elderly women and younger girls further underscores the vulnerability of girls in these areas. Participants identified specific areas, like the Iraqi Eastside (Kaduna North LGA), Kinkinau (Igabi LGA), Police barracks, and Constitutional Rock side (Kaduna North LGA), as danger zones where the safety of women and girls is compromised.

### Life Path & Pressure Points for Women and Girls - A Concept Map



## Matrix of Voices: Socio-Demographic Patterns of Life and Challenges Faced by Women and Girls

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANT
<b>Socio-demographic patterns of life</b>	The way women live in the community varies. There are full housewives; there are working wives; there are businesswomen and those who are into petty trading at home.	FGD, 29-year-old Female, Borno State
	Women spend almost all their time in households and most of them do not work. The girls in most cases attend one of these schools (informal, primary, and secondary schools) but they do not work.	FGD, 20-year-old Female, Kano State
	They don't go to school because they don't know the importance of acquiring knowledge.	FGD, 37-year-old Female Participant, Sokoto State
<b>Challenges faced by women and girls</b>	In my area, as I said, the challenge is mostly there is a group of people, they call them SUKA which they don't allow them to move freely where they want. They don't allow women and girls to move freely, because there is a road that if you follow, maybe after <i>Magrib</i> prayer or Isha prayer, that is not safe.	FGD, 43-year old Female participant, Kaduna State.
	It depends on which type of work you will do. For example, women are not allowed to do any security khaki work. Then, bank work, company work, and hotel work. There are many works that women are not allowed to do even when they are at home, in front of their parents. Some are allowed to work by their parents, but their suitors may say that they will marry them if they agree to stop going to work.	FGD, 23-year old Female participant, Kebbi State.
<b>Stigmatization and Stereotyping as a Challenge faced by Women and Girls</b>	There are most especially areas, like Sabon layi (ward) girls that leave there, people take them as if they are just living their lives. They are not responsible. So people from that environment, if a guy wants to just date a girl from that environment, they will say that they are all of them are bad girls. So, you know, have a good response from the people that are in that area. The girl, because she stays in an environment where people differ, they see her as bad	FGD, 35 Year old Female Resilient Woman, Pantami, Gombe State.
	It happens everywhere, urban and rural. But the reason why it is higher in rural communities is because people are uneducated, even when they are violated, they don't even know that they have rights that could be protected. Some know their rights but they are frightened that something can happen to them if they report. Some feel ashamed to go and report because they feel that reporting is like you are revealing your secrecy to the public. When a girl has been raped by someone, people use to say that the thing should be	FGD, 32 Year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State

	covered because revealing it will deny her a chance of getting a husband when she is due for marriage.	
<b>Risky Behaviors that Expose Girls and Women to Violence</b>	Peer influence also contributes. No matter how good your efforts are, if your child is with bad friends, they'll spoil your child. You have to know your child's friends, where they go, and who they associate with. I know a mother who follows her daughter to school to ensure she is going to school.	FGD, 42-Year old Female Participant, Zamfara State
<b>Danger Zones for Women and Girls</b>	Yes, there are danger zones in my area I lived in Kinkinau so like if you are moving to Iraqi Eastside dangerous for women and girls. It's dangerous especially for girls because you as an elderly woman if they see you they can even spare you but as for the girls hmm.	FGD, 46-Year old Female, Kaduna State
	Places like garages where cars are repaired are dangerous for young girls. I've seen men holding young girls and speaking to them inappropriately. Older women are less likely to accept such behavior unless they are interested.	FGD, 24-Year old Female Participant, Zamfara State

## Theme One: Trends and Patterns of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Violence against women exists in every country of the world. It affects every segment of society and is prevalent among all age groups. VAWG is considered one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations in the world. Irrespective of differing cultural contexts, many perpetrators of violence against women count on the fact that their behavior will receive little censure from within their community (Deutsche Gesellschaft 2005). One in three women experience physical, sexual, or intimate-partner violence; are survivors of trafficking, or

**Globally**

**1 in 3**

Women experience physical, sexual, or intimate-partner violence; are survivors of trafficking, or are subject to violent social norms.

Almost **1 in 3**

Have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life."



**In Nigeria**

**1 in 5**

Women, endure female genital mutilation

**21.4%**

Women face physical and/or sexual violence in the hands of their partner or husband."

are subject to violent social norms. In addition, almost one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life. This violence is often perpetrated by current or former intimate partners (UN Women 2024; Spotlight Initiative 2022).

Similarly, Women for Women International (n.d), reported that in 2021, violence against women has been one of the most pervasive human rights violations. It corroborated the findings from UN Women and Spotlight Initiative dating back to 2021 that globally, 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, and that rate is much higher in conflict and post-conflict settings. In Nigeria, VAWG is often rooted in widely accepted harmful social norms and practices that contribute to gender inequality more broadly; 21.4% of Nigerian women face physical and/or sexual violence in the hands of their partner or husband, and 1 in every 5 women endure female genital mutilation, notably in southern Nigeria.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) states that:

Violence Against Women is a manifestation of historical unequal power relations between men and women informing domination and discrimination preventing women and girls full advancement.

It further provides that violence against women is one of the racial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate positions compared to men. In addition, violence against women and girls is an act of gender-based violence, resulting in or likely to result in physical, mental, and sexual suffering to women and girls. It may include acts of coercion, threats, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, as well as violation of the right to dignity. Violence against women and girls is a worldwide menace, which has been described by the WHO as a problem that affects the health status of women and girls, their reproductive health, economic and social powers as well as emotional state (Ojukwu & Agu 2020).

In the Northern part of the country, women are admonished by the culture to be submissive to their husbands and any male counterpart. The women in the family ensure that this aspect of the culture is upheld and ostracizes the female child or their female counterparts who dares to question the status quo. The patriarchal structure is embedded in tradition, culture, and religion practiced by the people (Ojukwu & Agu 2020).

Various forms of VAWG exist in the affected states, these forms of violence include Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), early marriage, forced marriage and physical abuse, rape, emotional abuse, harassment, stalking, child abuse, torture, etc. Based on study findings, the report affirms that the trends of VAWG are high in the sampled state. While Rape and domestic violence were identified as the major forms of violence against women and girls, the perpetrators of these acts were found to be mostly related to the survivors, either directly or indirectly through familial ties. Ojukwu & Agu (2020) found that most forms of violence experienced by women and girls include rape, domestic violence, forced/early marriage, harmful traditional practices (including widowhood practices and denial of inheritance), physical assault, sexual assault, and female genital mutilation, among other human rights violations. One of the main contributing factors to gender-based violence is the deliberate misunderstanding of women and girls' human rights and the generalized society's approval of cultural practices and attitudes that violate women's and girls' rights. These abuses are perpetrated with impunity and few of the perpetrators are held accountable for the abuse. WRAPA involvement through the Sexual

Assault Referral Center in Jigawa State shows that there is an active effort to encourage and manage the reporting of VAWG cases. WRAPA training of 100 women to bring

complaints of VAWG yielded positive outcomes as over 600 cases were reported in the last six months.

**Sexual Assault Referral Center in Jigawa State** shows that there is an active effort to encourage and manage the reporting of VAWG cases.

**100**  
WRAPA training of 100 women to bring complaints of VAWG yielded positive outcomes.

**600+**  
Over 600 cases were reported over a six month period.

**Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

The infographic features a central illustration of four women: one in a wheelchair, one with glasses, one in a hijab, and one with a red headscarf. A dark green box at the top contains the title and introductory text. Two light blue boxes on the left provide statistics, each accompanied by a yellow icon (a semi-circle for '100' and a clipboard for '600+'). The bottom of the infographic has a dark green box with the text 'Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)'.

## Domestic violence and intimate partner violence were identified as the most commonly reported forms in the studied states.

The study showed that women (especially married women) experience a different form of violence from girls (especially teenage girls). Domestic violence and intimate partner violence were identified to be the most commonly reported forms of violence against women in the studied states. This is most prevalent among newly wedded couples and wife battery was considered the most common form of domestic violence. This is accompanied by other forms of physical and emotional violence. In Niger State specifically, punitive measures have been taken to minimize wife battery as anyone convicted of beating his wife attracts a fine of ₦200,000 thousand naira. This suggests that many women experience violence within their homes, often at the hands of their partners and this has discouraged most teenage girls from getting married which is unconnected to physical and emotional abuse experienced at the hands of their ex-lovers.

On the other hand, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, forced marriage, and child marriage were identified as prevalent forms of violence experienced by girls. These forms of violence are particularly harmful as they affect the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of young girls, often with long-term consequences. This is in line with the findings by WRAPA (2023a) which indicated that women and girls aged 15-49, more than 1 in 10 (12.5%) were subjected to sexual and/or physical violence. In addition, as reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 7,349 cases of GBV were reported between January 2020 to July 2022, of 4,281 (58.25%) of reported incidences the relationship with the perpetrator was non-intimate while sexual and physical violence accounts for 72.3% of violence reported in spotlight initiative states. Similarly, WRAPA (2023b) indicated that child marriage is a prevalent form of violence and is a deeply ingrained practice in some parts of Nigeria which has cast a long shadow on the lives of young girls. This is simply because it stripped of their childhoods, education, and opportunities, these young girls face a future fraught with health risks, limited economic prospects, and increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. Katsina

State, unfortunately, bears the burden of having one of the highest child marriage rates in the country.

The study findings identified several high-risk locations for VAWG, including schools, public spaces, incomplete houses where laborers work and sleep, markets, farms, and motor parks. These places are frequented by perpetrators and are environments where vulnerable children are exposed to potential harm. Children who are not in school and are engaged in hawking are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The act of selling goods in public spaces brings them into contact with adult men who may take advantage of their situation. Rape was considered more prevalent as it occurs almost daily, and the perpetuation of such is usually during daytime but more prevalent at night, this is to ensure adequate cover and identity concealment.

### High-Risk Locations for VAWG

The darkness at night and the presence of uncompleted buildings create an environment where perpetrators can commit crimes with little risk of being caught. These physical conditions increase the vulnerability of women to violence, particularly sexual assault. Rape, particularly involving minors, is identified as the most common form of violence against girls and women in Kebbi State. The high frequency of rape cases, with multiple cases being heard in court each day in the North east, most Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps were considered vulnerable locations where rape is

**The study findings pinpoint youths within the age range (30-40 years) as the primary perpetrators of VAWG**

prevalent. Women and girls are usually exploited due to their desperate need for food or money. This exploitation often involves perpetrators offering necessities in exchange for sexual favors, taking advantage of the dire circumstances of camp residents. The study findings pinpoint youths within the age range (30-40 years) as the primary perpetrators of VAWG. In addition, these perpetrators include close family members to the survivors, neighbors, relatives, and strangers. This authenticates the findings by Spotlight Initiative (2022) which revealed that the 2<sup>nd</sup> most common location where girls report having experienced sexual abuse is the schools. Despite such, the act of sharing familial or neighborhood relationships with perpetrators of violence as pinpointed by Spotlight Initiative (2022) was further authenticated as perpetrators are overwhelmingly people the children know: they are most likely to experience sexual violence in the perpetrator's home, followed by their own home, at school, at someone else's home, and on the road. Children are not

speaking out, seeking, or receiving services – they are more likely to tell a friend or relative than a service provider or authority figure. Many cases of violence are not reported and amongst those that are reported, most cases are settled out of court. Nearly half (45%) of women and girls (15-49 years) facing physical or sexual violence do not tell anyone about their experience of violence - only one-third (31%) seek help, while only 5% of children below 18 years who experienced physical violence sought for help.

...female domestic workers whose fear of losing their jobs prevents them speaking out, perpetuating the cycle of abuse

## Patterns of VAWG

Violence starts at a young age. Over half of children first experienced physical violence between the ages of 6 and 11 years, while approximately 1 in 10 children's first experience is under the age of 5 years (Spotlight Initiative 2022). The patterns of VAWG identified include physical violence (slapping and beating), emotional violence (verbal abuse and criticisms), financial abuse (underfunding by husbands, financial exclusion), isolation, and threats. Participants indicate a troubling cultural norm where families, particularly parents, pressure women to remain silent about the abuse they face. This is often done under the guise of preserving the family unit for the sake of the children, but it also perpetuates a cycle of violence and forces women to endure ongoing abuse. The enforced silence, driven by familial pressure, isolates women, leaving them with limited options for seeking help. This isolation exacerbates their vulnerability, making it more challenging for them to escape abusive situations. The most alarming consequence of this cycle is that women, when unable to bear

the abuse any longer, may run away from their homes. The lack of support and resources then increases the likelihood of them turning to prostitution as a means of survival. This outcome reflects the desperation and lack of alternatives available to these women.

Domestic violence in wealthy households is often hidden from public view, contributing to a culture of silence around the issue.

Study findings showed the prevalence of domestic violence especially among intimate partners and female domestic workers which is due to the gendered expectations, thus increasing their vulnerabilities. This abuse is mostly physical and psychological and usually prevalent in rich homes. Domestic violence in

wealthy households is often hidden from public view, contributing to a culture of silence around the issue. The fear of losing their job by the house helps or facing further retaliation may prevent house helps from speaking out, perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

Similarly, VAWG is commonly perpetrated within the context of marriage and intimate relationships. Spouses or partners are often the perpetrators, using threats, violence, and economic control as tools of abuse. There is a notable emphasis on the use of money and economic power to exert control. Outside marital relationships, men use financial resources to induce or manipulate women and

girls, which can lead to various forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse. The most common forms of VAWG noted include rape, threats of harm, divorce or abandonment, and issues linked to broader social challenges such as unemployment and insecurity. These forms of violence are interconnected, with economic and social instability exacerbating the risk of abuse.

The study further noted that in most of the northwestern states, women are restricted from leaving the house without permission from either their parents, guardians, or husbands. The restriction is mostly prevalent in male-dominated societies among uneducated women.

## Daily Nature and Places Where VAWG Takes Place

VAWG takes place both at private residences and public places. Domestic violence was considered to be rife in private residences while other violence such as rape occurs in public spaces like markets, construction sites, schools, men's residences, car parks, etc. This mostly occurs to teenage girls hawking in the street. In most of these public spaces, the perpetrators usually utilize city outskirts, and within uncompleted buildings due to the seclusion of the spaces.

...violence predominantly occurs in the morning or evenings, linked to the husband's departure for work or daily activities.

Study findings noted a disparity between rural and urban areas in terms of the frequency and context of VAWG, particularly rape. VAWG, especially rape, occurs more frequently in rural areas compared to urban centers. This is attributed to several factors, including a lack of enlightenment, poverty, and weaker security measures in rural communities.

Financial strain or stress within the household are common triggers for violence.

People in urban areas are more enlightened and better protected, which leads to lower rates of

The violence appears to be an assertion of control, where the husband uses shouting or hitting to dominate the situation.

violence. This contrast underscores the gap in awareness, resources, and security between urban and rural settings.

Study findings highlighted the daily nature of violence against women and the increased risk during festive periods for girls. This occurs mostly at men's residences as most females visit their suitors' apartments in the guise of festive outings. Research respondents indicated that violence mostly occurs at night during festivals, holidays, and other celebratory periods. These events create environments where social norms are relaxed, supervision is reduced, and opportunities for perpetrators to exploit vulnerable situations increase.

As for the married women, the study discovered that the violence predominantly occurs in the morning, linked to the husband's departure from work or daily activities. The request for money for breakfast is identified as a common trigger for violence. This indicates underlying

financial strain or stress within the household, where the husband's inability or unwillingness to provide money leads to frustration and aggression.

...husband's inability or unwillingness to provide money leads to frustration and his aggression to assert dominance or control.

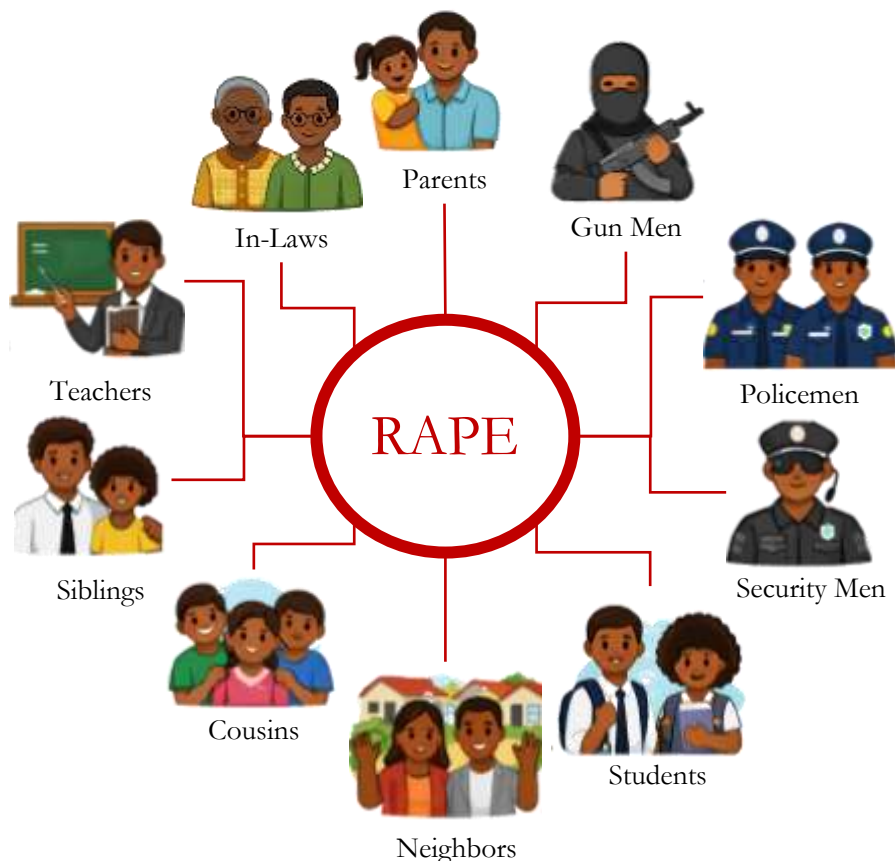
The violence appears to be an assertion of control, where the husband uses shouting or hitting to dominate the situation. This reflects gender dynamics where financial control is used as a tool for exerting power over the wife, reinforcing patriarchal norms.

Similarly, the study also revealed that violence primarily occurs in the evening as well, a time when husbands return home and interactions with their wives begin. This timing suggests that the stress or fatigue accumulated during the day might contribute to a lower threshold for conflict, leading to arguments that escalate into violence.

### Perpetrators of VAWG

The study showed many perpetrators of VAWG. In terms of domestic violence, husbands have been indicted to be major perpetrators of violence against their wives. In terms of rape, many stakeholders have been indicted, these include parents, in-laws, teachers, siblings, cousins, neighbors, security men, students, gun men (especially in insecurity-

prone states like Katsina and Zamfara States), and other community members. In addition, the Police have also been indicted in the cases of VAWG, especially cases of rape. This is simply rooted in the fact that they delayed justice and sometimes showed favoritism towards cases affecting influential individuals.



## Prevalence or Severity of VAWG

Deutsche Gesellschaft (2005) highlights that Violence against women and girls is a fundamental violation of human rights, which stretches across nations, cultures, and classes. It is a mass phenomenon taking many different forms with disastrous consequences for women's and girls' health and survival. The social and economic costs resulting from this abuse place a substantial burden on society as a whole, significantly hampering development. Therefore, preventing violence against women and girls is also a key contribution to achieving most of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to reducing poverty. Violence against women and girls is one of the most direct expressions of the power imbalance between men and women.

Study findings showed mixed findings as it affects the rate of violence against women and girls. On one hand, respondents lamented the increased rate of violence, especially aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Factors linked to the prevalence include population displacement resulting from conflict, thus increasing vulnerability to violence, minimization of humanitarian aid and food supply by International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and economic hardship. Ojukwu & Agu (2020) assessed the prevalence of VAWG in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and indicated that violence against women took a crisis dimension which was exacerbated by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that hit the world in January 2020, and the declaration of global pandemic in March 2020. This led to lockdowns, closure of businesses, and loss of earnings. With the lockdown, more reports of violence against women and girls were recorded. The Commission, between March and June, received and treated about 232 cases from across the country. These include cases of rape and attempted rape of both adult and minor females, physical assault, forced and early marriages, emotional trauma/abuses, denial of livelihood etc. Besides the violence that came to the fore due to the lockdown, there were reported cases of harmful traditional practices

such as denial of inheritance rights, widowhood practices, survival sex, trafficking, early and forced marriages, forced prostitution, exploitation for accommodation, and female genital mutilation, among others.

Similarly, Girls and women below the age of 30 years old were considered the most vulnerable age-cohort who are mostly the survivors or survivors of VAWG. In conflict-prone states like Katsina and Zamfara State, VAWG is exacerbated by insecurity, forced migration, poverty, and cultural practices that contribute to the exploitation and abuse of women and girls.

The lack of stable shelter and economic resources makes them easy targets for exploitation by rapists and those who lure them into prostitution. The desperate circumstances force some women and girls into exchanging sex for money or food, highlighting the

**Awareness generated through advocacy efforts has increased reportage of VAWG cases reflecting a shift in societal attitudes**

intersection of poverty and sexual exploitation. This underscores how prostitution becomes a survival strategy for many women and girls who find themselves homeless and impoverished. The lack of support systems and economic opportunities drives them to engage in sex work to meet their basic needs. This situation is aggravated by the predatory behavior of men who take advantage of their desperation.

In addition, forced marriage, often justified under the pretext of Islamic teachings, is another significant contributor to increasing VAWG. This practice not only strips women and girls of their autonomy but also pushes some into prostitution as they seek to escape abusive or unwanted marriages. This is aggravated by the denial of resources such as shelter, food, and medical care by husbands or guardians. Katsina and Sokoto States were

explicitly identified to be one of the states where forced marriage is prevalent.

On the other hand, there is a decrease in the cases of violence. This is connected to the growing awareness and active involvement in addressing violence against women. This involvement spans various sectors, including religious and traditional leaders, NGOs, law enforcement (Civil Defense, police), and community organizations. Stakeholders further lamented that the rate of rape has decreased because girls are now more enlightened and willing to report cases of rape. The reduction in stigma associated with reporting has empowered more girls to come forward, which is a crucial factor in addressing and reducing VAWG. The media program "Mata a Yau" is specifically mentioned as a contributing factor in the fight against VAWG. This indicates that awareness campaigns, especially those delivered through widely accessible media like radio, play a significant role in changing attitudes and behaviors.

In addition, the factors responsible for the decrease are attributed to the continuous advocacy which is identified as a key factor contributing to the changes in how VAWG is addressed in most of the states. In Kaduna specifically, a coalition of various organizations works together to combat VAWG. This coalition plays a critical role in reporting, advocating, and pursuing justice for survivors, indicating a coordinated and collective approach to addressing VAWG. This is also

accompanied by the formation of community vigilante groups and regular patrol by security agents to make dangerous routes safer for women and girls, especially at night.

Furthermore, the awareness generated through advocacy efforts has led to an increase in the reporting of VAWG cases. This reflects a shift in societal attitudes where survivors are now more likely to report incidents because they believe they can receive justice. The implication is that the overall incidence of VAWG has decreased because people are more aware of the consequences and the support available.

Advocacy efforts have made it clear that there is a system in place to report and address VAWG, which may deter potential perpetrators. Furthermore, the rate of wife battery equally decreased drastically as most women, especially in Kaduna State collectively avenge the beating of their fellow neighbors, especially when the woman is not at fault, this made most male partners minimize wife beating in the state.

**VAWG has decreased because people are more aware of consequences and available survivor support.**

## **Influence of social norms and cultural beliefs towards VAWG**

Most societies have a belief system within the community that appears to implicitly tolerate violence against women and girls especially when it remains hidden. This creates a culture where violence is not openly condemned, instead, it is brushed under the rug. The societal expectation is that as long as the violence is not publicly known, it is not a problem. Based on study findings, there is a stigma associated with speaking out against VAWG. Those who dare to break the silence and bring these issues to light face opposition, not just from perpetrators but also from the broader community. This

opposition manifests in various forms, including social ostracism, verbal attacks, or even physical threats. The community's body language—non-verbal cues, lack of intervention, or passive acceptance—signals a tacit approval of violence. These unspoken messages reinforce the notion that VAWG is a norm that does not warrant serious intervention unless it becomes publicly scandalous.

Study findings highlight the cultural stigma associated with reporting sexual violence, particularly rape. In rural communities, there is

often a belief that reporting such incidents is akin to revealing one's secrets, which can lead to social ostracism. This shame is a powerful barrier to reporting, as survivors may fear being judged or rejected by their community. There is a cultural belief in some communities that if a girl is known to have been raped, it will damage her prospects of getting married. This belief leads to pressure on the victim and her family to cover up the incident, further discouraging reporting and perpetuating a cycle of silence.

In addition, in most of the states, there is a belief system that the man is the unquestionable authority in the household which leads to a power imbalance, where the man's decisions, actions, and even violence are seen as justified or acceptable. This norm reinforces the idea that women should be submissive and not challenge their husband's authority, even in situations of abuse. Women are culturally conditioned to remain silent and passive in the face of violence. The fear of retaliation, societal judgment, or further violence prevents them from speaking out or seeking help. This silence perpetuates the cycle of abuse, as the woman's inability to respond is seen as acceptance or complicity. The cultural acceptance of male dominance creates an environment where violence against women is not only tolerated but also goes unchallenged. This leads to widespread instances of domestic violence, where men feel empowered to exert control through violence, knowing that there will be little to no repercussions.

Study findings further indicate that social norms and cultural beliefs influencing attitudes toward VAWG in the studied states are largely shaped by the misconception of religious teachings. Participants revealed that the way religious teachings are misunderstood or misinterpreted contributes significantly to how VAWG is perceived and tolerated in the community. Religious texts are sometimes misinterpreted to justify and perpetuate violence and control over women. Participants noted that scriptural teachings about submission are often taken out of context, disregarding the need for mutual respect and the provision of necessities. This indicates that certain harmful practices or attitudes towards women are justified or

excused based on these misconceptions. The implication is that these religious misconceptions are embedded in broader social norms and cultural beliefs, which either condone or discourage VAWG. The implication is that there is a potential misalignment between the true teachings of the religion and the way they are practiced or understood within the community. This is why participants advocated for preaching the true message of the scriptures understandably to the populace.

### Cultural beliefs downplay the importance of open communication about sexual education and personal safety especially for girls.

This corresponds to Onyemelukwe (2021) where WRAPA corroborated the trends of VAWG in its 2022 report which revealed that the most predominant forms of VAWG in the North Central are sexual violence, abduction, and rape while violence prevalent in the North-west & North-east are child early marriage, forced marriages, rape and child labour. The root causes in the North Central include Traditions and norms, poverty, ignorance of human rights, deprivation of rights, culture of silence, and religious misinterpretations. In the northwest & northeast, the root causes of this violence include patriarchy, poverty, lack of awareness of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, and harmful cultures and traditions.

In addition, study findings indicate that overly strict parenting inadvertently led to the vulnerability of children, particularly girls. This is because strictness limits children's ability to learn about and navigate the world independently, making them more susceptible to abuse or violence. Similarly, parental carelessness was identified to be a socio-cultural factor exacerbating and increasing susceptibility to violence as failure to adequately protect or educate children about the risks of VAWG. This carelessness stems from cultural beliefs

that downplay the importance of open communication about sexual education and personal safety. As such, lack of sexual education is a significant cultural factor contributing to VAWG. Without proper education, children may not have the knowledge or tools to protect themselves, making them more vulnerable to abuse.

Furthermore, study participants reflect the deep-rooted influence of social norms and cultural beliefs on attitudes towards Violence Against Women and Girls. In most of the focused states, forced marriage is deeply entrenched in many cultures and is often justified by social norms that prioritize familial or male authority over the autonomy of women and girls.

## **Ways to Change the Influence of social norms and cultural beliefs towards VAWG**

Norms are deeply embedded in the fabric of society, shaping behaviors, attitudes, and expectations. Because these norms have been passed down through generations, they are often accepted without question, making them difficult to alter. Study findings advocated for public enlightening about the dangers of adhering to harmful norms which can be a powerful tool for change. This is because education reveals the often-hidden consequences of these norms, particularly how they can perpetuate cycles of instability and violence across generations.

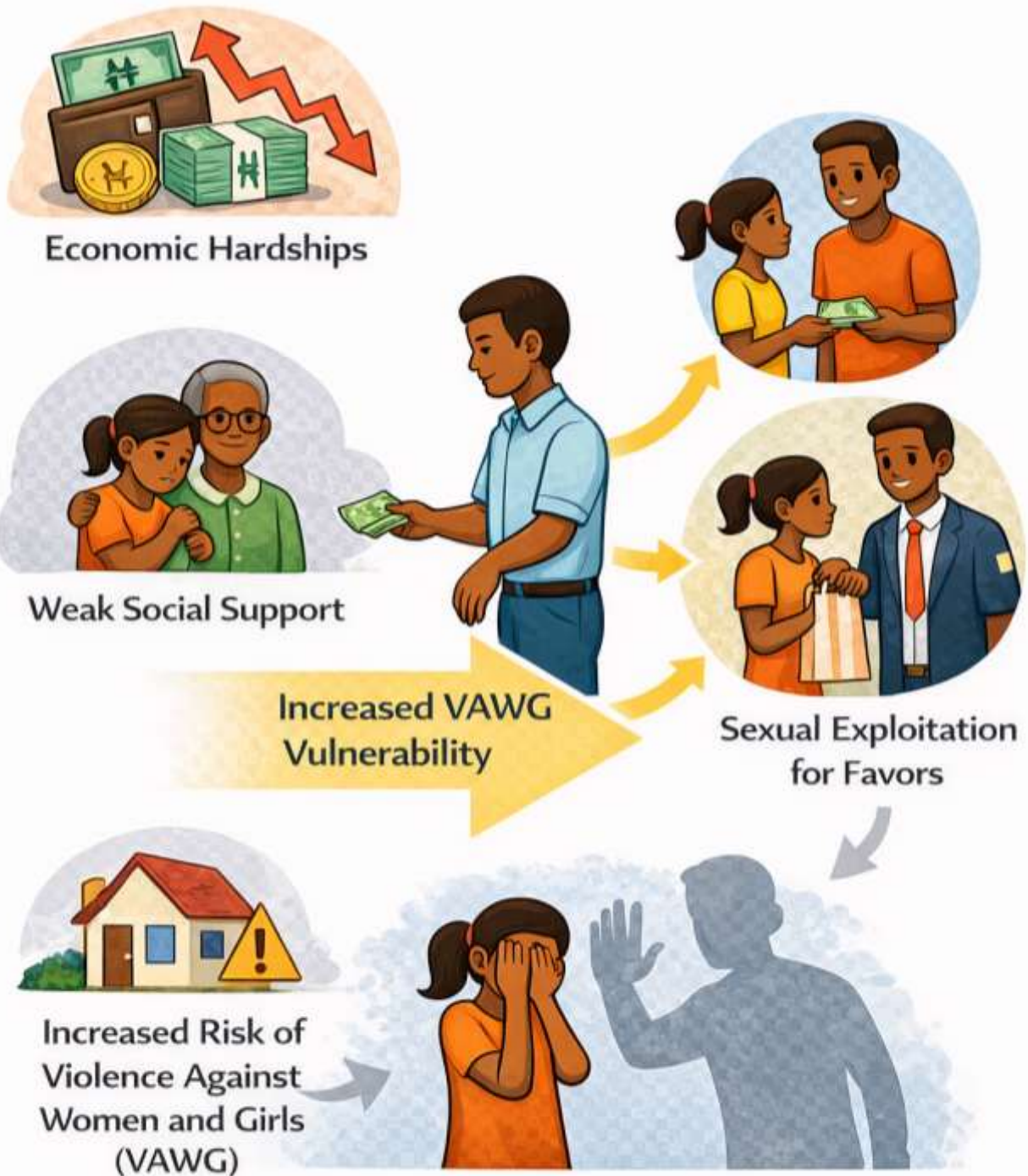
Study findings showed the need to change these harmful cultural practices by employing concerted efforts from diverse groups in society. This involves stakeholders like religious leaders, traditional authorities, media practitioners, educators, healthcare providers, comedians, and legal professionals. With this caliber of stakeholders, the message against harmful practices can reach different segments of the community more effectively. In Kebbi State specifically, participants encourage religious leaders to address VAWG during sermons and religious gatherings, emphasizing the importance of respect and equality within religious teachings in the state

## **Provision of Sexual Favors for Basic Needs**

Study findings highlighted a troubling issue where poverty and social inequities force vulnerable individuals, particularly women, and girls, to provide sexual favors to meet their basic needs. The economic hardship prevalent in the country, exacerbated by poverty and the lack of social support, creates a situation where

vulnerable women and girls feel compelled to exchange sexual favors to survive. The situation reveals a stark power imbalance, where influential and powerful individuals exploit the vulnerability of women and girls for sexual favors.

**Prevalent economic hardships and weak social support systems increase VAWG vulnerability compelling survival trends of exchanging sex for favors**



## Matrix of Voices: Trends and Patterns of VAWG

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANTS
<b>Trends of VAWG</b>	Yes, in Borno State, as well as my organization, it's all the same. Yes. Violence against women, particularly in Borno, and it's reported to our office. It's like domestic violence and intimate partner violence against women. Yes. And, concerning girls, it's like sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, child marriage, and the rest.	KII, 48-year-old Female NGO Representative, Borno State.
	More than 55 per cent. In WRAPA, we have a sexual assault referral center in Jigawa State. We trained 100 women to bring women's complains. In 6 months, there were more than 600 cases.	KII, Male WRAPA Representative, Jigawa State
<b>Patterns of VAWG</b>	Well! it does not necessarily have a specific pattern because you might begin to wonder if no class of girls or women are violated. The young, the old, in fact, the newborn. And perhaps the pattern will be, which ones occur more at what times. At the early stage of the month, when people just collect their salaries, the type of violence you see will be beating, physical violence, which is wife battery in most cases, and then when the months get to the middle and climbing up becomes difficult, you begin to also see wife battery.	KII, 56-year old Female Government Representative, Kaduna State
	The patterns that we have observed in the way VAWG is perpetrated in our community include sexual violence, physical violence, house underfunding, stalking, and threats. But the most common ones are forced sexual intercourse and rape. I have observed the way VAWG in our society. For instance, I know a 13-year girl who was raped by our neighbor, and the rapist was convicted before a court of law.	FGD, 28-year-old Female, Kano State.
	Islam has given women a lot of protection and privileges. But there are instances where husbands leave their wives with children and leave without feeding and other responsibilities. Some husbands are not feeding their family, including beating.	KII, 56-Year-old Male Faith Leader, Katsina State
	Yes, we have noticed certain patterns. Physical violence, such as beating and slapping, is commonly carried out by intimate partners or family members. Emotional abuse is also prevalent, with survivors often subjected to verbal insults and constant criticism. Another pattern we've observed is economic abuse, where survivors are denied access to financial resources, making them dependent on their abusers.	KII, Female WRAPA Coordinator, Sokoto State

<p><b>Prevalence or severity of VAWG over the past few months or years</b></p>	<p>To my mind, honestly, is decreasing for the fact that so many people are onto this violence against women, against very many people are interested. Religious leaders are interested. Traditional Leaders are interested. Most NGOs are interested. We are from one. They are very much interested. Okay, from one, from one. We work seriously with someone and the Christian, they say, well, we can women in camp. We work seriously with them. Feeder, just as said, as I said again, Civil Defense, the police, most of these people.</p>	<p>KII, 62-Year old Female WRAPA Coordinator, Gombe State.</p>
	<p>I think it's a multiple factor: <b>One</b>, these people are displaced mostly. <b>Two</b>, the INGOs have introduced the idea of giving free food. And now they have stopped because we are out of the humanitarian area. Now we are in a developmental area, so there is no free food. <b>Thirdly</b>, economic hardship also contributes.</p>	<p>KII, 49-year-old Female Government official, Borno State.</p>
	<p>The rate of rape has reduced because girls are enlightened to report cases of rape in the area that they no longer feel shy to report it. It has reduced halfway (50%) because some parents like ours are trying their best to send children to schools and educate them to protect themselves. Factors that help include awareness. There is a program that is played today on the radio called "Mata a Yau", which contributes to the fight against VAWG.</p>	<p>FGD, 38-year old Female, Jigawa State</p>
	<p>Yes of course! There has been a decrease in the number of VAWG over the past few months. The factors that contribute to the changes are education, enlightenment, and counseling of the girls who are living around the area. This development positively affects the devastating consequences of VAWG as girls are advised on how to protect themselves and avoid danger zones where the abusers are likely to stay.</p>	<p>KII, 38-year-old Female NGO Representative, Jigawa State</p>
	<p>Well, in my community, I think the women somehow have much physical violence and emotional violence, because you find out that married men tend to bring small children to the house, small girls to the house. Like, it's becoming disrespectful and it affects the children emotionally. There was a time when women in my area made it like, they took it upon themselves that anyone who brings a girl to the house with his wife, would go to the house, beat the girl, and beat the man. And girls most of us indulge in selling or helping our parents to sell things around the pattern we face is once you sell something some men come not to buy but they will start saying some words that you feel offended and it affects us emotionally</p>	<p>FGD, 41-Year-old Female, Kaduna State.</p>

	<p>For example, in recent times domestic violence in our society is increasing because a lot of husbands threaten abuse, and beat their wives in front of their children, members of the extended family, and friends. In addition, trafficking (house girl) is also increasing in our state. Many underage house girls face challenges at their places of work which include threatening, verbal abuse, raping, brutality, and a lack of schools. I know a house girl who was brutalized with heat water by her master. Rape is also among the most common forms of VAWG, a lot of cases are being discovered recently in our society.</p>	FGD, 24 Year old Female, Kano State.
	<p>GBV is going higher in Katsina State, especially in the frontline LGAs that are suffering from security challenges in Katsina State. Similarly, some of the secured LGAs are becoming vulnerable because the forcibly migrated women and children are moving to the secured LGAs and that is where they are exploited before getting food or shelter.</p>	KII, 56-Year-old Government Official, Katsina State.
<b>Places and times where Violence takes place/occur</b>	<p>Yes, of course. Um, I think maybe, probably I've noticed it does happen around the daytime, and mostly women, are vulnerable in the sense that they are economically low, and so people seem to take advantage of that. For example, a girl goes out for selling things that are not even up to 500 Naira or 1000 people take advantage and buy all the things and rape them. Men take advantage of these girls. Most like, maybe, consumption sites, construction sites the girls visit for their sells.</p>	FGD, 30-Year-old Female Woman, Gombe State.
	<p>In my area, it happens mostly in the morning when the husband wants to go out and the wife asks him to give her money for breakfast before going out. Then violence will come if you see him shouting or hitting.</p>	FGD, 38-Year old Female Woman, Kaduna State
	<p>Schools, public spaces, incomplete houses where laborers work and sleep; markets, farms, and motor parks. Because many of the perpetrators are there and the vulnerable children did not go to school, all they do is hawking and the perpetrators take advantage of the children's vulnerability, while carrying what they are selling to the adult men.</p>	KII, 38-year-old Female NGO Representative, Jigawa State
	<p>Well, like I said, in most cases, violence against women is perceived almost as the order of the day, and it does not matter the time, place, or circumstances. These things do occur, but mostly these things occur in the evenings or at night when somebody is trekking in a lone area or maybe targeted assault. In most cases, the rape cases we receive are rape of young persons without their consent and usually with deceit, usually with deceit.</p>	KII, 56-year old Female Government Representative, Kaduna State

	Honestly, it more frequently happens in rural areas than urban areas because in urban centers people are enlightened and there is security more than in rural areas. And because of poverty, you tend to see that these things happen every day in rural communities. Again, rape is also on the increase because girls do go to bushes for gathering firewood, and other things. So, their life is as easy as that of urban areas.	FGD, 28-year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State.
	Their boyfriend's apartment. The girls go there voluntarily, sometimes a young man may have up to three young girls in his room. I have witnessed this kind of scenario just yesterday.	FGD, 26-year-old Female Participant, Sokoto State.
	During festivals, weddings, and Eid celebrations, when economic pressures and the desire for luxury increase, violence tends to rise. Parents sometimes push their children into harmful situations due to financial constraints.	KII, 34-year-old Female WRAPA Coordinator, Zamfara State
<b>Perpetrators of VAWG</b>	It happens in the markets when vulnerable women go to purchase things they are being looked down on and harassed, in public places also even in vehicles even at home children are being sexually harassed even by their fathers, we have seen a case where a father impregnate his daughter and we seen cases a brother impregnate biological sister all sort of dirty, dirty things. It takes place even in schools where teacher harasses their pupils and students.	KII, 53-year old Female Government Representative, Niger State
	Wallahi, for me it is my husband and his friends.	FGD, 26-Year old Female participant, Katsina State.
	Yes, the police. Sometimes they connive with perpetrators and deny survivors justice. They show favoritism to the rich while the poor suffer.	FGD, 42-year-old female participant, Sokoto State.
<b>Factors responsible for the increase and decrease in cases of VAWG</b>	The factors that contribute to the changes are continuous advocacy. Kaduna has a coalition of various organizations against VAWG and this coalition is a compendium of various organizations that serves the purpose of reporting, advocating, and pursuing justice for survivors. So the major cause for the decrease in incidences is the fact that people are now becoming more aware and there is advocacy around, Please don't waste time in reporting. But then there is an increase in reportage because now people know that they can report and they can get justice.	KII, 56-year old Female Government Representative, Kaduna State
	In my area too it has reduced. Once the community realizes that these things are becoming frequent, they decide to bring things that will reduce it. Like if you beat your wife and they investigate and know that you are the one with the fault, but still you are bitter. It is women that they will gather to beat you. It is not men.	FGD, 45-year-old female participant, Kaduna State.

	<p>Like the way number 6 said, the cases of rape have dropped because of the presence of so many human rights organizations that protect the rights of women and children. It also dropped down because people are increasingly becoming educated. But domestic violence for married women is honestly on a higher level due to maybe poverty, marrying too many wives, and with many children. You could see a man marrying 4 wives and many children and having no means to take care of the wives and children. This brings chaos and domestic conflict among the couples. Still, you will see a man loving outside his home before the marriage, but once you have gone to his house, that love and care is over. He will start maltreating you.</p>	<p>FGD, 38-year-old female participant, Kebbi State.</p>
<p><b>Influence of social norms and cultural beliefs towards VAWG</b></p>	<p>Let's see for example in Hausa culture because in Hausa culture we all know that they will say man is the head of the house and whatever he says stands. Even if he's killing her she wouldn't dare respond or reciprocate or do whatever to retaliate you understand so he violates her based on that.</p>	<p>FGD, 43-Year old Female participant, Kaduna State.</p>
	<p>Social norms and cultural beliefs influence attitudes towards VAWG in our society. The most common harmful cultural practices of VAWG are forced marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). These harmful cultural practices can only be changed to prevent VAWG via advocacy, sensitization, awareness, and mobilization of people about the impact of such practices. For example, I have a niece, and 2 students currently, her father wants to marry her to somebody who she doesn't love, born and of his personnel interest.</p>	<p>KII, 38-Year-old woman of resilience, Kano State</p>
	<p>I can say that part of our norms that influence VAWG in Katsina State is the fear of stigma. Parents and guardians are afraid to expose cases of violence against their daughter's wives or relatives. They refused to speak; the culture of silence is fueling the VAGW.</p>	<p>KII, 56-Year-old Male Government Official, Katsina State</p>
	<p>Well, it has a lot to do with that. Honestly, the people's misinterpretation of scriptures has a lot, it is encouraging this act. Some people quote a verse that a woman must be submissive, without looking at whether have you provided something for the woman or the girls. And the scriptures say people should go to school, whether man or woman, but you will deny them education, you deny a lot of these. So, people use culture, we are the boss, and we are the controllers of the house. So, they perpetrate all these things. Because of tradition now people don't want to be in shame. So, it is not reported. It is a shame for it to be reported, so, it is a shame for it to be reported. So, tradition and religion and I think it's not as if it's the tradition.</p>	<p>KII, 36-Year-old Male NGO Representative, Kebbi State</p>

	<p>The African culture that gives the man the autonomy and power to marry more than one wife needs to be taken care of because the man thinks he is the boss of the house and does things the way he wants, even without the concern of his wife. So, men will even go ahead to say “I pay your bride price and other things, so I owe you and you have to abide by my rules.” The go-ahead to harass their wives sometimes, and they even rape them, because of the superiority the African culture has given to men above woman</p>	<p>KII, 53-year old Female Government Representative, Niger State</p>
	<p>Cultural beliefs play a significant role in perpetuating violence. For instance, some communities still hold the belief that disciplining a wife through physical means is acceptable. Additionally, harmful practices like early marriage are often justified through cultural or religious lenses. Changing these deeply ingrained beliefs requires continuous community engagement and education.</p>	<p>KII, Female WRAPA Coordinator, Sokoto State</p>
<p><b>Ways to Change the Influence of social norms and cultural beliefs towards VAWG</b></p>	<p>It’s not easy to change norms because that is what people have grown up to live by. But I think if we can enlighten people more, to see the dangers, because the dangers are in stages. An unstable mother will raise unstable children, especially when there is no community support and so if we can open people’s eyes to how it can become a generational factor, it will go a long way</p>	<p>KII, Female NGO Representative, Kaduna State.</p>
	<p>These harmful cultural practices can only be changed through collaboration with Imams, traditional leaders, journalists, comedians, educationalists, medical professionals, legal professionals, government officials, Community Services Organizations (CBOs), and more. The collaboration between governments with relevant stakeholders can improve the awareness of people about the implications of such harmful cultural practices to the survivors, perpetrators, and the environment.</p>	<p>FGD, 38-Year-old Female Participant, Kano State</p>
	<p>It can only be changed through advocacy to religious leaders, to traditional leaders. You understand? Because when I say religious leaders, here in Kebbi state whenever there is an issue, no matter what you say no matter how you continue to advocate, and in as much as you do not show people religiously, that the religion has said you can do it, people will not look at you. So, the traditional, the religious leaders during the Friday sermons and then in whatever situation they find an opportunity like here in every Friday we use to have teachings being organized since 1999. So, these are kinds of places where maybe it has been as the people of telling the importance of revealing us so that you know cut the menace of happening.</p>	<p>KII, 48-year old Resilient Woman, Kebbi State.</p>

<b>Provision of Sexual Favors for Basic Needs</b>	<p>There are many times that girls do give sexual favors because of something like food, and school fees, most especially for the children that their parents cannot take charge of their responsibilities. This influences them to these sexual delinquencies because of getting basic needs.</p>	<p>FGD, 28-Year-old Female Participant, Kano State</p>
	<p>Yes, I have a case when a young girl boarded a tricycle in the night and she pleaded with the man to have sex with her in exchange for money the man objected and it turned to violence between them. People intervened. After proper interrogation, it was discovered that the girl boarded a tricycle but could not pay the fare and she offered herself in exchange for the fare. It is one good Samaritan that settled the case by paying the fare.</p>	<p>FGD, 39-Year-old Female Respondent, Niger State</p>

## Theme Two: Existing Protection and Prevention Services for Survivors of VAWG

Policies and legislation are essential tools for ending violence against women, but they are only effective when implemented and enforced in compliance with international standards and recommendations. There are 1,585 legislative measures across 193 countries to address violence against women. (UN Women 2024). There are several policies and laws relating to VAWG in Nigeria. Some of these policies and laws are passed and domesticated as act, and these includes Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women (the Maputo Protocol), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons Living with Disability, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. On the domestic level, Nigeria has enacted several laws which provide for the protection of women and children from VAWG. The most relevant is the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPPA) (Onyemelukwe 2021).

The domestic framework for the protection of the rights of women and the girl child is predicated on the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, the VAPP Act 2015, ACJA 2015, the Penal Code, the Criminal Code, and the Child Rights Act 2003. Besides the laws, there are policies and programs which have been formulated to protect women and girls from violence. At the National level, the policies include the National Gender Policy, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions in Nigeria, and the National Policy and Action Plan for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria (Ojukwu & Agu 2003). Before 2003, there were no national laws expressly or specifically protecting the rights of women

against violence. Where there is a semblance of protection, they are often inadequate, discriminatory, or limited by the undue burden placed on the victim. Remedies under criminal law are confined to the prosecution and possible conviction of the offender (UN 2008).

Despite the passing of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) in 2015, which prohibits violence against any persons in public or private life, VAWG remains pervasive across Nigeria. The enactment of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act which proposes wide-ranging provisions for many aspects of violence, including violence against women, is therefore a pivotal event with the potential, arguably, to transform the landscape of violence against women in Nigeria. The VAPP legislation includes provisions for and protections against physical offenses including those that disproportionately affect women such as female genital mutilation; forceful ejection from home; forced financial dependence or economic abuse; forced isolation; emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse; harmful widowhood practices; and spousal battery, among others. However, the Nigerian Constitution does not recognize marital rape as a crime and includes a section that says a man cannot be convicted of rape of his wife, as long as his wife has reached puberty. This leaves marital rape as an important loophole and oversight in the VAW protections framework between the VAPP and Constitution in Nigeria (Women for Women International n.d; Adeleye n.d).

The VAPP law has specifically strengthened advocacy against rape, FGM, partner battery, stalking, harmful widowhood practices by state actors while prohibiting all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, domestic, harmful traditional practices; discrimination against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for survivors and punishment of offenders (WRAPA 2023a). Though the government

passed the VAPP law at the national level, only Kano State has not passed a legislative bill on the law, while Lagos and the Ekiti States have Protection against Domestic Violence Law and Gender Based Violence Prohibition Law respectively and they have some of the provisions found in the VAPP law. Almost all states have assented the law except Kano (which is yet to pass the law as a legislative bill), Rivers and Taraba (which is awaiting assent by the Governor) while Lagos and Ekiti domesticated their existing laws as it incorporates the provisions found in the VAPP law (Partners Nigeria 2024). This sporadic and incomplete countrywide adoption may pose a challenge to the implementation of any comprehensive VAW legal framework within Nigeria and may create space for sociocultural norms and traditions to supersede legal permissibility when it comes to the acceptability of VAW (Women for Women International n.d; Adeleye n.d).

The enactment 2015 of the VAPP Act can be said to be a measure in line with Nigeria's international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the protocol to the African Charter. VAPP Act punishes not only direct acts of spousal violence but also acts of coercion by deprivation, isolation, and emotional abuse. The Act among other things prohibits female circumcision/ female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forceful ejection from home, and harmful widowhood practices. It also prohibits abandonment of spouses, children, and other dependents without sustenance, battery, and other harmful traditional practices (Women for Women International n.d; Adeleye n.d)

The bedrock upon which the Nigerian legal system is built is the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice being part of the country's social objectives enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In the Constitution, there are numerous provisions offering protection to all citizens against violence, injustice, and discrimination. For example, section 33 (1) of the constitution states that every person has a right to life and no one should be unjustly deprived of his life. Section 34 provides for the dignity of a person and prohibits torture or any degrading treatment of a human being. Section 36 (5) provides that in determining any civil and criminal matter, the accused person should be given a fair hearing as every accused person is innocent until the contrary is sufficiently proved in a competent court of jurisdiction. There is also the Child Rights Act of 2003 which provides for detailed protection of a girl child until she attains the legal age of 18. The Act seeks to end forced labor and child marriages and to ensure effective health services for pregnant teenage girls in the country. In addition to the foregoing, the federal government of Nigeria has ratified many international and regional conventions that condemn GBV and other acts that temper the fundamental rights of women and other vulnerable groups (Mshelia 2021). Some of the existing policies, laws, and protection programs will be discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

The Violence Against Person's Prohibition Act (VAPP) of Nigeria was passed in 2015. In a recent report on VAPP tracker released by Partners Nigeria (2024) shows the status of the VAPP law in the ten sampled states in the study.

**Table 3: Status of VAPP Implementation in the Ten Research States**

S/N	STATE	LEGISLATIVE STATUS (BILL)	EXECUTIVE STATUS (LAW)
1	Borno	Passed in 2022	Assented to on 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2022
2	Gombe	Passed on October 18th, 2022	Assented to on 13th December 2022
3	Jigawa	Passed on the 24 <sup>th</sup> of February 2021	Assented to on 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
4	Kaduna	Passed in December 2018	December 1st, 2018
5	Kano	Yet to be passed	-
6	Katsina	Passed	Assented to on 22nd December 2023
7	Kebbi	Passed on 30th September 2021	Assented to on 27 <sup>th</sup> July 2022
8	Niger	Passed on February 24th, 2021	Assented to on November 3rd, 2021
9	Sokoto	Passed on January 19th 2021	Assented to on 22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2021
10	Zamfara	Passed in December 2023	Assented to in 2023

Source: *Partners Nigeria (2024)*.

Study findings indicated that in all the targeted states, none of the states fully implemented the VAPP law in their respective states. This is why stakeholders called for the need for ongoing engagement and advocacy for the VAPP law implementation with partners, especially NGOs and CSOs. This is considered essential for sustaining and scaling up partnerships.

### **Existence of Protection and Prevention of VAWG Service Providers**

There are several existing protection and prevention service providers in place across the sampled states. These services are sometimes provided by the State Government via the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, NGOs, and CBOs among others. These organizations include FIDA, ABC, WRAPA, (Borno State), CERSCOV (Kaduna State), Giscos, Pearls and Wellbeing Foundation (Sokoto State) SESVOC Initiative (Zamfara State), Hizbah (Kano State), etc.

Most of the states have established centers where reported cases of VAWG are managed. These centers provide essential services,

including case management and protection for survivors who come forward to report incidents. In Borno State specifically, there are established channels for referral, particularly in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, where incidents are more readily reported. Despite the existence of support services, many survivors, particularly in host communities, are reluctant to report incidents.

In addition, in Zamfara State specifically, there is a coordinated effort to mitigate violence against women and children, evidenced by the comprehensive directory of service providers established through collaboration with the

World Bank. This directory, which encompasses at least 337 service providers across the state, and LGAs, ensures a prompt response when incidents occur. The directory includes health facilities, law enforcement agencies, prayer groups, women's groups, traditional leaders, and religious leaders—essentially all stakeholders involved in

addressing GBV and child protection. This initiative represents a significant step toward building a robust network of support and intervention to combat violence at the community level.

## Existence of Safe Spaces (SARC)

The provision of protection services for survivors of violence is a critical aspect of the rehabilitation of survivors, particularly through the Safe Spaces (SARC). This center serves as a haven for girls who have been raped or whose rights have been violated. At SARC, these survivors are not only provided with immediate care and support but are also trained in various skill acquisition programs. This training is facilitated through partnerships with other NGOs, enabling survivors to gain valuable skills that can aid in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Similar to the availability of SARC centers in most of the states, the study noted the availability of other centers that provide shelter to survivors. In Kaduna State specifically, there are shelters for survivors. One such center is the Center for Study and Resolution of Domestic Violence (CERSDOV). CERSDOV runs a shelter offering short-term support to survivors of domestic violence and other forms of abuse.

The shelter provides a haven where survivors can stay for up to three months, away from dangerous environments. Ojukwu & Agu (2020) corroborated this argument because, in most states in Nigeria, there is the SARC, where survivors meet professionals, have a safe space to tell their stories, and be attended to by professionals trained to offer medical, and legal, economic, and psychosocial support. SARC comprises the Ministries of Health, Women Affairs, Justice, the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, representatives of CSOs, and the media. It is domiciled in most of the general hospitals or medical centers in the city center and provides free services to survivors. SARC has been established in 25 States and has been accessed by an estimated 13,075 survivors as of June 2020, since its first launch in Lagos in 2013. These policies are besides some states' efforts at establishing sex offender registers to name and shame sex offenders in the state

## Legal Aid Services

Legal support plays a critical role in the comprehensive services provided to survivors of violence, particularly in cases of rape and other severe forms of gender-based violence. In most of the states sampled, legal aid services are a fundamental component of the support structure for survivors. These services are often provided by a coalition of dedicated legal professionals, NGOs, and CBOs who are committed to ensuring justice for survivors. These services are typically extended to survivors at no cost, which is crucial given that many survivors, especially those from marginalized or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, cannot afford the legal fees necessary to pursue their cases in court. This is to ensure that survivors have access to justice, which is an essential aspect of the broader support and protection framework. Without this legal support, many survivors might be discouraged from pursuing justice due to the fear of legal costs, the complexity of legal processes, or the potential for re-traumatization during court proceedings.

## **Availability of Emergency Response and Dignity Kits**

Stakeholders (especially in Jigawa and Zamfara States) lament that there are no emergency response mechanisms in place, including emergency phone numbers and dignity kits that are available at some of the nearest health facilities. These dignity kits were designed to provide immediate support to survivors of rape and included essential items such as Postinor (emergency contraceptive), Postinor 2, PT strips (pregnancy tests), soap, garments, sponges, pads, towels, and some antibiotics. The dignity kits played a crucial role in providing first aid and urgent care to survivors, ensuring that if the victim had contracted an infection, they would receive immediate medication.

## **Role of Organizations in Supporting Access to Protection Services for Survivors of Violence**

In the critical realm of supporting survivors of violence, organizations play a pivotal role that can either facilitate or obstruct access to essential protection services. These entities, ranging from NGOs, CBOs, and international agencies, are instrumental in shaping the new landscape of support available to survivors. Their actions, policies, and resource allocations directly influence the effectiveness and accessibility of protection services. Study findings showed that most of these organizations engage in enlightenment campaigns for women and teenage girls specifically. This sensitization has led to improved reportage of cases of violence by teenage girls. Despite the willingness to speak and reporting of violence, most survivors end up withdrawing cases or displaying disinterestedness in the cases in the long run which is due to stigmatization by community members despite the willingness of most organizations to pursue cases to the very end. Additionally, faith leaders equally play a pivotal role in preaching and raising awareness about the ills of VAWG. In the past, gender-focused organizations were less prevalent, but their presence had increased over time due to collaboration with faith leaders.

## **Use of Technology in Providing Protection Services to Survivors of Violence**

In an era defined by rapid technological advancement, the integration of technology into the provision of protection services for survivors of violence represents a transformative opportunity to enhance support and accessibility. Technology has the potential to revolutionize and approach the challenges faced by survivors, offering innovative solutions that can significantly improve their safety, well-being, and access to resources. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) created a 'sex offenders' online register with the full identity of convicted felons ([nsod.naptip.gov.ng](http://nsod.naptip.gov.ng)) as part of its mandate to administer the provisions of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. The main thrust of the law is to eliminate violence in private and public life and prohibit all forms of violence against persons to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for

survivors and punishment of offenders (Spotlight Initiative 2022).

Stakeholders lamented that mobile applications designed for reporting incidents of violence can provide survivors with a discreet and accessible way to seek help. In Kaduna State specifically, CERSDOV is planning on developing a digital app to fast-track the reportage of VAWG. Digital platforms can be leveraged to run awareness campaigns, reaching a wider audience and educating communities on the dangers and unacceptability of violence. This is because creating and maintaining databases for tracking incidents can aid in monitoring trends, ensuring accountability, and improving resource allocation. These technological solutions can significantly strengthen the overall framework for combating violence by making prevention and response mechanisms more efficient and accessible.

The study indicated that most of the organizations providing support services to survivors of violence do not have advanced technology at their disposal but rather employ conventional technological tools that facilitate various aspects of support and documentation. Stories of survivors were recorded digitally,

ensuring accurate and secure record-keeping. Photography was utilized to document evidence and conditions, while technology enabled efficient communication with relevant authorities through calls and other digital means.

## **Role of Community-Based Initiatives in Addressing and Preventing VAWG**

Harmful gender norms are the foundations for violence against women and girls. The relationship between women's experience of violence and education is not linear and inversely proportional as in many other countries. While typically more educated women tend to suffer lower levels of intimate partner violence, this is not the case in Nigeria. Working on the prevention of violence requires a holistic approach and the engagement of all actors which Spotlight Initiative identified to include; strengthening community support initiatives to address violence against women and girls, engaging traditional rulers and religious leaders as they play a pivotal role as community gatekeepers and drivers of social change because of their moral authority and influence, developing awareness campaigns to address negative gender norms and stereotypes, and share information on laws, policies, reporting and support mechanisms that exist (Spotlight Initiative 2022). In addition, the platform provided by WRAPA has helped break the culture of silence by women and girls, thus allowing them to speak of any form of violence vented towards them by men (WRAPA 2022). Study findings indicated that most stakeholders come to be aware of WRAPA either through their various intervention programs (creation of safe spaces and SARC centres) and the involvement of traditional and religious leaders in ending forms of VAWG in states like Plateau, FCT and especially in ending child marriage (especially in Katsina). In addition, other people come to be aware of WRAPA initiatives as employees in the organization.

In many African cultures, the well-being of one individual or family was considered the concern of the entire community. This communal

approach ensured that issues like violence, poverty, and illness were addressed collectively, with everyone playing a part in finding solutions. However, the erosion of these values has led to a more individualistic mindset, where people only concern themselves with issues that directly affect them. Study findings showed that proactive engagement with the traditional institution, especially knowledgeable traditional leaders has successfully helped in addressing cases of violence at the community level. For instance, in Lamisula Ward and Bolore Ward (of Borno State), there is a notable proactive engagement with traditional institutions as community leaders in these areas have demonstrated a strong commitment to the welfare of their communities. This is because these leaders displayed an active commitment to the welfare of the people without showing recourse to financial benefits. However, not all traditional rulers were cooperative as some leaders required incentives or were otherwise reluctant to support community initiatives because their interests had to be met.

### **Emergence of new proactive engagements with culture & faith institutions successfully addressing cases of violence at the community level.**

Most of these initiatives were clearly in line with survivors' motives like access to education, to survivors which is mostly tuition-free, and economic empowerment initiatives for women to sustain their families among others. These existing protection services would help

minimize the dependency of women and girls which further increases vulnerability to violence.

In addition, religious misinterpretation and deeply rooted cultural beliefs were identified to reinforce VAWG. Stakeholders identified the need to critically review and address these misinterpretations to prevent the perpetuation of harmful practices, particularly those that contribute to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Misinterpretations of religious teachings often justify or excuse abusive behavior, creating an environment where violence is tolerated or even encouraged. Similarly, cultural beliefs that reinforce gender

inequality or condone violence were identified and deemed fit to be challenged and reformed. In achieving this, participants streamline is essential to engage religious and community leaders in this process, ensuring that accurate interpretations of religious teachings are promoted and harmful cultural practices are identified and eliminated. This is to discourage people from using religion and culture as a means to justify violence, and instead, these systems should be harnessed to promote respect, equality, and protection for all individuals, especially women and girls.

## **Emergency Support Services Needed by Survivors**

The study findings showed that the most urgent support services needed by survivors were classified into two categories. In terms of rape, medical support services were considered to be of paramount importance, while survivors of domestic violence require psychosocial support and economic empowerment. Stakeholders further contend that both survivors of violence and rape require an urgent change of environment, legal services, and other empowerment initiative. These elements were deemed essential in addressing the immediate aftermath of violence and ensuring the survivors' safety and well-being.

## **Effectiveness of the Existing Services**

Even though there are existing protection and prevention services in most of the sampled states, these services were considered ineffective as most of the people expected to benefit from these services are unaware of these services. The only services considered partially effective were the medical, psychological/psychosocial, and legal services. The legal services in most instances hardly reach a conclusion or judgment. Most of the organizations (local and international) were supportive in providing crucial services, particularly to indigent women who cannot afford legal representation, ensuring they have access to justice.

In addition, the current strategies implemented to combat VAWG have achieved some progress but remain insufficiently effective. These strategies tend to focus more on addressing the immediate symptoms of violence rather than tackling the underlying root causes. Deeply ingrained cultural norms and economic inequalities, which significantly contribute to the persistence of VAWG, have not been adequately addressed by existing measures. As a result, the long-term effectiveness of these strategies remains limited, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach that targets the foundational issues perpetuating violence

## Matrix of Voices: Existing Protection and Prevention Services for Survivors of Violence

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANT
<b>Existence of Protection and Prevention of VAWG Service Providers</b>	<p>Well, we have state government when I say state government, we have the Ministry for Humanitarian Services and Social Development, WRAPA itself builds what are called safe centers where survivors can be referred to, where they will be advised to do the necessary things to help them and prepare them against any court case when the need arises. Not only that, but we have also been working with traditional leaders, and faith leaders who at times provide a kind of canceling service to the survivors and we also provide canceling to survivors depending on the type of violence perpetrated.</p>	<p>KII, Male WRAPA Coordinator, Kaduna State</p>
	<p>As for the Kebbi States, we have a SARC Center. SARC Center. That's a Sexual Assault Referral Center. So, this center is where the victim, the survivor, we don't, we are not calling them survivors, so we call them survivors. Yes, the survivor, that's where we take the survivors to give them health-wise, to protect their image, to give them all the necessary support they need. So, in Kebbi State and under this SARC Center, we have a technical working group in Kebbi State which was funded during the last administration. So, with that technical working group any case of gender-based violence, we take charge they go there and foresee all the effort they can put in to protect the image of the survivor.</p>	<p>KII, Male WRAPA Coordinator, Kebbi State</p>
	<p>There are emergency phone numbers and also a dignity kit with test kits is available at some of the nearest health facilities. In the dignity kit, there is Postinor, Postinor2, PT strip, soap, garment, sponge, pad, towel, and some antibiotics to provide first aid if the victim of rape had the infection, she will receive urgent medication.</p>	<p>KII, 47-year-old Female Government Representative, Jigawa State</p>
	<p>As Faith leaders, we have been preaching to people like during Ma'ulud, there are gender organizations that in the past did not exist. We call their husbands and male relatives of women to caution the violators of women and girls' rights in the Katsina metropolis.</p>	<p>KII, 56-Year-old Male Faith Leader, Katsina State</p>

	In terms of protection, we have our laws protecting women and girls and one such law is the Violence Against Person Prohibition law and we Child Rights law. We also have saved homes where we keep survivors temporarily to counsel them to regain fully from the emotional trauma that they may have passed through. We also have our sexual assault referral center (SARC) where survivors are managed.	KII, 53-year-old Female Government Representative, Niger State
	We have SARC centers (the only centers for GBV cases with lawyers, healthcare workers, and security personnel). These centers are available to anyone who has faced violence. However, we only have two centers in Zamfara State, one in Gusau and one in Kaura. This is why WRAPA is thinking of getting more safe centers. This new project involves creating safe spaces in the residences of traditional rulers, stakeholders, and influential people.	KII, 34-year-old Female WRAPA Coordinator, Zamfara State
	There is, because right now, I work with the World Bank on, we mark the GBV child protection service providers, we have the directory, So, those directories, we marked at least 337 service providers across the state with LGA's that can be able, whenever things like that happen, so they will respond. So, we have all the health facilities, law enforcement agencies, prayer groups, women groups, traditional leaders, and religious leaders, it includes everybody who is a stakeholder in mitigating violence against women and children.	KII, WRO Representative, Zamfara State
<b>Urgent Support Services Needed by Survivors</b>	It is healthcare, medical services concerning rape. And, about other abuses, maybe domestic violence, they may need psychosocial support.	KII, 53-year old Female Government Representative, Niger State
	Most urgently they need psychosocial support, they need medical support and then they need a change of environment. These are the most immediate needs.	KII, 56-year old Female NGO Representative, Kaduna State.
<b>Effectiveness of the services</b>	Concerning prevention, we have medical services. We have Psychosocial support and access to justice. We have the services, but they are not effective. Why I say it is not effective, is because the people are not aware of the services. The services are available but our people do not know of it, they are not aware.	KII, 48-year-old Female FIDA Representative, Borno State.

	Existing policies and laws are often insufficient or poorly enforced. While there may be laws against violence, their implementation is weak, and survivors often face barriers in seeking justice. But we know nothing about the laws.	KII, Woman of Resilience, Sokoto State
	It depends on which type of work you will do. For example, women are not allowed to do any security khaki work. Then, bank work, company work, and hotel work. There are many works that women are not allowed to do even when they are at home, in front of their parents. Some are allowed to work by their parents, but their suitors may say that they will marry them if they agree to stop going to work.	FGD, 23-year old Female participant, Kebbi State.
	Current strategies have made some progress but are not entirely effective. They often address the symptoms rather than the root causes, such as deeply ingrained cultural norms and economic inequalities.	KII, WRO Representative, Sokoto State
<b>Use of technology in providing protection services for survivors of violence</b>	yes of course you know that everything you do now is almost done technologically, there is nothing you can do without involving technology, so we use technology in recording their story, keeping records of their story, taking pictures, making calls to contact the relevant authorities.	KII, WRAPA Coordinator, Kaduna State.
	It happens everywhere, urban and rural. But the reason why it is higher in rural communities is because people are uneducated, even when they are violated, they don't even know that they have rights that could be protected. Some know their rights but they are frightened that something can happen to them if they report. Some feel ashamed to go and report because they feel that reporting is like revealing your secrecy to the public. When a girl has been raped by someone, people use to say that the thing should be covered because revealing it will deny her a chance of getting a husband when she is due for marriage.	FGD, 32 Year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State
<b>Expanded Services for Survivors of VAWG</b>	New programs could include mobile units that provide legal and medical aid directly to villages, community-based counseling services, and educational workshops for both men and women on gender equality and violence prevention.	KII, Woman of Resilience, Sokoto State

## Theme Three: Gaps Existing Protection and Prevention Services for Survivors of VAWG

Violence against vulnerable persons, including women, is prevalent in Nigeria. In addition to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, many women in Nigeria experience female genital mutilation/circumcision, forceful ejection from home, and other harmful traditional practices stemming from long-held cultural beliefs. Section 55 of the penal code (applicable in Northern Nigeria) legalizes corrective beating of a child, pupil, servant, or wife as long as these do not cause grievous bodily harm. This law harms women and girls in Nigeria. Under the Sharia penal Code, a husband cannot be guilty of marital rape (section 127 of the Zamfara Harmonized Sharia Code). Furthermore, under Islamic law, a husband may be liable for injury caused or occasioned by forced sex with his wife, but he can never be liable for rape so long as there is a valid subsisting marriage between them. Evidence shows that women who accuse men of rape are subject to the judgment of their character and there is no recognition of marital rape, thus there is limited protection for women in Nigeria. Here, the survivors (who are mostly

women) have to rely on the provisions in the Criminal Code on common assaults in cases of marital rape occasioned by the activities of their husbands (Adeleye n.d).

In Nigeria, 88% of the population considers religion a driving force in their lives, and research has often framed religious leaders as a pervasive influence on progressive societal views. Some religious leaders continue to defend certain types of VAW, especially when the wife threatens the position of the husband as head of the household (Women for Women International n.d). This has affected several policies and programs targeted towards addressing VAWG simply because most law enforcement officers and the law courts may consider such sanctions as executed based on religious principles by the perpetrators, especially the husbands. This section analyzes most of these gaps and challenges as they affect the protection and prevention services for survivors of violence.

### Corruption

One of the significant gaps established in addressing the needs of survivors, particularly in cases of violence, is the pervasive issue of corruption within the system. Corruption undermines the proper allocation and utilization of resources meant for victim support, leading to inefficiencies and gaps in service delivery. This issue is compounded by the lack of adequate resources, which are critical in providing comprehensive support, including training, legal services, and other necessary interventions for survivors.

In addition, security agents involved in ensuring justice for survivors of violence are sometimes bribed to change evidence, especially when

perpetrators involve influential or wealthy individuals or their guardians. This manifests in denying survivors justice which would have served as a succor to them. Case studies were narrated by participants in Sokoto, Kano, and Kebbi State as well. Similarly, the judicial officer was equally not left out of the menace of corruption. Regular adjournment of VAWG cases in the trial court usually discourages survivors and their guardians from attending court cases, especially transport and other cost implications involved. In such circumstances, the regular adjournment of cases often manifests in denying survivors justice. This is why stakeholders advocated for special courts to handle and expedite corruption cases.

## Limited Knowledge and Expertise among Service Providers

Study findings indicated a critical challenge considered a gap in addressing VAWG, related to lack of sufficient knowledge and expertise among service providers. Effective victim support requires a deep understanding of the dynamics between the victim and the perpetrator, as well as the circumstances surrounding the incident. Service providers must be equipped with the knowledge to assess the immediate needs of the victim, such as ensuring their well-being through medical attention, understanding the implications of the crime, and linking the incident to the perpetrator for appropriate legal action. Stakeholders averred that the process of supporting survivors involves several stages, starting with ensuring the victim's immediate welfare, understanding the incident, seeking justice through the legal system, and addressing the social implications for the victim. These stages require a coordinated and informed approach, which is currently hindered by the challenges of corruption, inadequate resources, and a lack of specialized knowledge.

Effective victim support requires a deep understanding of the dynamics between victim and perpetrator.

Supporting survivors has several stages, including immediate victim welfare, coordinated informed approach & specialized knowledge.

## Lack of Protection Services in Rural Areas

Participants highlighted several critical gaps in the protection and prevention services for survivors of VAWG in Borno State, particularly in the context of the ongoing challenges faced by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those returning to their ancestral homes. Study findings indicated that many IDPs particularly in Borno and Katsina States, have returned to

their ancestral homes, but there are no provisions for VAWG services in these localities.

This absence of support mechanisms leaves survivors without access to necessary care and protection. In addition, in most rural areas where VAWG is rife, certain areas remain hard to reach, complicating the ability of survivors to report incidents promptly. The urgency of reporting is critical, as delays can hinder the effectiveness of interventions, especially within the crucial 48-hour window post-incident. Synonymously, several gaps were identified in the existing protection services in the existing literature. Several groups were left out in the efforts toward ending VAWG. Onyemelukwe (2021) identified these groups in the north central which includes sexual minorities, women and girls in IDP, and female sex workers. In the North West & North East, these groups include Women with disabilities, elderly women and mentally retarded women.

Protection service challenges include gaps in information dissemination, lack of referral services and channels, and exclusion of vulnerable groups in rural areas.

In addition, gaps were noted in areas that include gaps in information dissemination, lack of referral services and channels, and exclusion of vulnerable groups in the North Central. In

the North East and North West, gaps identified include severe challenges with litigation and access to care.

## **Lack of Coordination and Unified Effort**

One of the primary issues established by the study is the lack of coordination among CSOs. While International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) appear to work more cohesively, often functioning as a network or team, CSOs are described as working in parallel rather than in unison. CSOs often operate independently, pursuing their objectives without aligning their activities with other organizations. This lack of coordination leads to fragmented efforts where each organization works towards its goals without considering the broader context or the work being done by others in the field. The absence of a unified strategy diminishes the overall impact of these organizations' efforts. The study highlighted that survivors seeking justice often face significant barriers, particularly when it comes to accessing legal support but are financially incapacitated. It was noted that even when organizations like FIDA step in to provide support, there are limits to what they can offer,

especially when it comes to covering the costs of hiring a lawyer or handling other legal expenses. Many survivors, unable to bear these costs, find their cases gradually abandoned, leading to justice being denied. The gradual erosion of cases due to financial constraints was a significant gap identified by the study.

In addition, the major issue encountered by most survivors and their relatives is that, even when violence occurs, individuals often lack information on where to report or how to contact relevant organizations. There is a significant lack of awareness about these organizations and their functions. To address this, stakeholders advocated for dedicated contact persons at each ward to connect survivors with these organizations. While some areas have liaison officers, their numbers are insufficient to effectively meet the needs of the community.

## **Insecurity and Ongoing Violence**

The activities of Boko Haram and banditry have continued to pose a threat to existing protection services in most rural areas. Participants lamented that the ongoing insecurity not only perpetuates violence but also limits the presence and operations of INGOs that could provide

support in insecurity-prone areas. As such, a gap was identified by the participants as the presence of governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as INGOs is minimal in these areas which further accentuate VAWG.

## **Limited Livelihood Support to Survivors**

Study findings showed that survivors of VAWG often require livelihood services to rebuild their lives, but these services are severely limited. Study findings confirmed that limited economic empowerment options contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls, making them more susceptible to violence. To achieve this, Diriwari (2023) revealed that in Nigeria, the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development takes the lead in ensuring adequate protection and well-being of women and exists to work for the attainment of the full

potentials of Nigerian women and children (especially girls) pool for national development, survival and protection of the right of the Nigerian child. To achieve this objective, the Ministry coordinates, maintains, and implements policies, programs, and initiatives for women's and children's rights, welfare, care, and protection. Furthermore, Diriwari highlights that the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) plays an important role in ensuring the protection of children, women, and girls.

NAPTIP was created primarily to tackle the problem of trafficking in persons, especially that of children. In this regard, NAPTIP has been able to investigate and prosecute traffickers as well as rescue and support survivors of trafficking. The Nigerian Police Force also gives

its support by having Family Support Units (FSUs) in place to handle domestic violence, child abuse, and other gender cases; they also have other forms of support such as counseling units, etc.

### Limited Legal Services to Survivors

A crucial limitation indicated by the study is in terms of providing legal services to survivors. Stakeholders lamented selection criteria based on indigene ship. In Borno State specifically, organizations such as FIDA face significant challenges. Specifically, logistical constraints hindered their ability to deliver services effectively. Without adequate logistics, it became difficult to meet the growing demand for support from women and girls in need.

These challenges were particularly pronounced when serving indigenous women who could not afford the services of a lawyer. Despite the increasing demand for legal support, the organization was forced to prioritize those who were most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged. As a result, they were unable to extend their services to all women in need, limiting their impact to a specific demographic.

### Limited Healthcare Providers and Services at SARC Centers

The effectiveness of the protection services provided at SARC centers was commendable. However, despite the successes, some challenges hindered the full effectiveness of these services. One significant identified by the study is the inconsistent availability of healthcare professionals, such as nurses and doctors, at various SARC centers. Due to resource constraints, these essential personnel are not always on-site, which limits the immediate care provided to survivors. Similarly, there was a shortage of trained personnel and technological resources, particularly at SARC. These centers often lacked qualified social workers, leaving nurses, who were not socially trained and equipped to provide proper counseling to fill the gap.

examinations; the absence of testing kits becomes a significant barrier to delivering timely and effective medical care. This gap not only hinders the immediate health response for the survivors but also complicates the legal process, as medical evidence is crucial for prosecuting cases of violence, especially sexual assault. This is commensurate to findings by Spotlight Initiative (2022) which established gaps in the aspect of the investigation. It was confirmed that Police stations need to have the financial means to investigate and arrest perpetrators, and need to be well staffed, well trained, and well equipped to ensure respectful treatment of survivors, evidence collection, and improvement of the quality of investigations. Forensic labs ought to be set up in all geo-political zones of the country as a key tool for evidence collection. In addition to that a functional prosecution hub for cases of sexual violence against women and children, family courts, and special courts on GBV need to be set up to ensure that cases of violence are fairly and promptly treated. Additionally, the capacity of law and security institutions to deliver efficient judiciary services needs to be strengthened so that survivors receive the appropriate legal assistance and be protected against intimidation and reprisals.

In addition, despite the critical role these centers play in the aftermath of violence, particularly in conducting necessary tests and providing medical care, most SARC centers often lack essential testing kits. **Stakeholders** highlighted a significant challenge faced by most SARC centers. In Kaduna State specifically, CERSDOV provides comprehensive support to survivors but faces challenges when cases are referred to SARC centers. This is evident when survivors are taken to SARC centers for medical

## Poverty and Lack of Access to Transportation to Cities

Poverty and inadequate transportation are two interrelated issues that significantly impact access to essential services, including those offered by the government and protection organizations for survivors of violence. These challenges create barriers for individuals, particularly in rural and underserved areas, who need to reach urban centers where services such as legal aid, medical care, and counseling are more readily available. Stakeholders identified a

pressing need for transportation services to facilitate the relocation of survivors to urban centers, as many survivors of rape are from impoverished backgrounds and lack the means to travel. Addressing this issue requires enhanced funding to provide such transportation. Many cases go unreported due to the financial inurement from rural areas to urban cities.

## Gaps in the Implementation of VAPP Law

Several gaps are considered potent challenges affecting the implementation of relevant VAWG laws and policies. These challenges are prevalent across all regions in the country. In the North Central region, some of these gaps include; poor knowledge and lack of grassroots awareness, lack of trust in constituted authorities, and poor implementation of identified laws e.g. VAPP Act. In addition, in some states, these laws and policies are signed and silenced, and poor knowledge of the law by key implementers/enforcers and the public. In the North East and North West, the following as being the main drivers for poor implementation of VAWG laws as being; religious and cultural practices that discourage justice-seeking and thus law implementation, Poor knowledge of the VAPP Act, lack of political commitment to the issues affecting women and girls, interferences from law enforcement agencies and the judiciary during prosecution of rape cases, adjustment of the Law to suit personal desires (Onyemelukwe 2021).

While laws like the VAPP Law exist, the implementation remains inconsistent as many local courts lack the jurisdiction to enforce the law effectively, limiting its impact on reducing VAWG. One of the primary gaps identified in the enforcement of domesticated laws, particularly those addressing domestic violence and rape, is the lack of adequate knowledge about these laws and their enforceability. Stakeholders highlighted that this gap stems from the absence of enforceable rules and effective legislation, which significantly hampers the ability to implement social change.

Participants pointed out that, as it currently stands, there is uncertainty about whether there are local laws or agencies specifically designated to enforce these critical social changes. While some agencies, such as the police through their Gender Units, and the Civil Defense Corps, have structures in place to handle issues related to rape and domestic violence, these efforts are fragmented and lack cohesion. The absence of comprehensive, enforceable legislation exacerbates this problem, making it difficult for these agencies to function effectively. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice, which is expected to provide legal services to those who cannot afford them, often falls short of delivering adequate support. This shortfall creates a significant gap in the criminal justice process, especially in cases involving violations of women's rights. This lack of harmony between the different components of the criminal justice system often fails to deliver justice.

The impact of these limitations on survivors is profound. When the legal system fails to deliver justice or sanctions that match the severity of the crime, survivors lose trust in the system. This disillusionment not only affects the individual victim but also discourages others in the community from seeking justice. The society, observing these failures, becomes disillusioned, leading to a broader sense of mistrust in the legal and justice systems. This erosion of trust ultimately perpetuates a cycle where crimes such as domestic violence and rape continue unchecked, as potential

perpetrators are emboldened by the perceived inefficacy of the system.

The implementation of the VAPP Law in states like Kaduna, Kebbi, Borno, and Niger State faced significant challenges. Despite the law's existence, many judges remained unaware of its provisions, hindering its application in the courts. Despite efforts made by organizations such as WRAPA to promote the use of the VAPP Law across all courts in the state, these attempts have yet to achieve full success. Additionally, there was a notable gap in the unification of various women's groups in most of the sampled states. Although a coalition of NGOs and CBOs existed in these states, the alliance was not vibrant, often plagued by rivalry. This lack of cohesion among the groups diminished the potential impact that a united front could have had in driving more significant results and success.

Furthermore, the implementation of the VAPP law in most states encountered significant challenges, particularly related to policy gaps and procedural requirements. One of the primary obstacles identified (especially in Borno State) was the necessity to obtain the consent of the victim, particularly those of legal age, before initiating any legal proceedings related to abuses covered under the VAPP law. This requirement has created a substantial barrier to the effective

enforcement of the law. In many cases, survivors may be unwilling or unable to give consent due to various reasons, including fear, stigma, or pressure from their abusers or community. As a result, the need for consent has hindered the law's implementation, making it difficult to address and prosecute cases of social abuses effectively. The gap in policy regarding this consent requirement has been a significant concern, as it limits the ability of legal and protective agencies to take swift and decisive action against perpetrators of violence.

Similarly, a significant gap was identified in the handling of cases involving VAWG, particularly concerning the actions of parents or relatives of survivors. In several instances, families usually approach the organization, expressing a desire to withdraw from pursuing legal action and instead resolve the matter privately within the family. This usually poses a considerable challenge for CSOs, which are committed to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable under the law. However, when families chose to withdraw cases before they reached CSOs, they retained the option to address the issue independently, thereby undermining the pursuit of justice. Looking at the VAPP law, the informed consent of the victim in this circumstance is undermined; this situation represents a critical gap in the overall efforts to combat VAWG.

## **Urgent Needs for Survivors of Violence**

Study findings showed that survivors of violence often require several services to re-corporate but the one considered most urgent is immediate medical attention. The priority of such is to address injuries and potential health risks. This includes not only treating physical injuries but also addressing urgent health concerns such as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and pregnancy. This is accompanied by psycho-social support to address demoralizing emotions and psychological abuse. In addition, participants advocated for economic empowerment which is equally considered to be of paramount importance as economic dependence increases vulnerability to more forms of violence.

**Matrix of Voices: Gaps in Existing Protection and Prevention Services for Survivors of Violence**

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANT
<p><b>Gaps in existing protection Services</b></p>	<p>Yes. Yes, there are these gaps. Because now most of these IDPs have been relocated back to their ancestral homes. Yeah. So, in their localities, there is no provision of these services. Moreover, some of these places are still hard to reach. Because if may Allah forbid, anything should happen, before you report the cases, actually within 48 hours, it must have lapsed. There are certain LGAs that still... The INGOs are not there because the insurgency is not yet over in some of the LGAs. And the insurgents are still violating the rights of these women. After being rescued, they come out with maybe pregnancies, some with two to three kids</p>	<p>KII, 49-year-old Female FIDA Representative, Borno State</p>
	<p>Yes, it's like for us. I can use my organization as an example. As for FIDA, we have a limitation concerning providing services, maybe about logistics. If you don't have the logistics, you cannot do that. And the people are now looking for support and we are now limited. We are now using women who are Indigenous women who cannot afford the service of a lawyer. This is a challenge for us. And the people are now requiring the services. And, because of that limitation, we cannot provide for all women. We are now limited to indigenous women and girls, who cannot afford the services of a lawyer.</p>	
	<p>Yes, certainly there are gaps because everybody is working according to his own. So, there is no coordination between these activities. Unless and until among the INGOs because they are working as a team. I think they have maybe a network or something. But within the civil society organization, civil society space, we are working in parallel. So, if my organization is working towards this direction, another organization is working towards this direction. And there are no coordination or referral processes among us. So, there is a huge gap.</p>	<p>KII, 49-year-old Female CBO Representative, Borno State</p>
	<p>There are gaps. For example, FGM is still practiced in some quarters. First of all, we need to fight some of the negative cultures, norms, and values and adopt modern thinking.</p>	<p>KII, 42-year-old Male NGO Representative, Jigawa State</p>
	<p>Yeah, the medical gap. Because for us at our shelter, if we don't take the persons to the SAC centers, we will always take them to the SAC centers for tests. But then when we get to the SAC centers, the SAC centers do not even have those testing kits. So the medical gap is very wide. And if people can get the opportunity for it to be filled, it will make sense.</p>	<p>KII, 56-year old Female NGO Representative, Kaduna State.</p>

	<p>It depends on which type of work you will do. For example, women are not allowed to do any security khaki work. Then, bank work, company work, and hotel work. There are many works that women are not allowed to do even when they are at home, in front of their parents. Some are allowed to work by their parents, but their suitors may say that they will marry them if they agree to stop going to work.</p>	<p>FGD, 23-year old Female participant, Kebbi State.</p>
<p><b>Lack of Protection Services in Rural Areas</b></p>	<p>One major gap is the lack of services in rural areas. Additionally, there's a need for more comprehensive livelihood support and better shelter facilities, and also a knowledge gap from the state response team or GBV task force. The stigma attached to seeking help also prevents many survivors from accessing these services i.e. culture of silence.</p>	<p>KII, WRO Representative, Sokoto State</p>
<p><b>Gaps in Implementation of VAPP Law</b></p>	<p>Lack of implementation, we still have cases that have not yet escalated using the VAP law, we have judges and magistrates or even prosecuting officers who do not even know what the law or the provisions of the law are, and as such they are not able to use the law properly.</p>	<p>KII, 56-year old Female NGO Representative, Kaduna State.</p>
	<p>As I told you earlier, we have existing laws in Kaduna state particularly the violence against persons prohibition law, which is in the state right now but the implementation of this law is a major challenge, up to this moment many of the judges that we have are not even aware of the VAPP law not to talk of implementing or using it in their various courts. Several attempts have been made in the past by WRAPA to see how the VAPP law can be used across all our courts in the state. Another gap is the coming together of various women groups to form a very strong alliance, as I said earlier we have a coalition of NGOs and CBOs in Kaduna state, they are not vibrant, and most times there is a problem of rivalry among them, everybody wants to recognize alone instead of them to work together as one which will bring more result and success.</p>	<p>KII, WRAPA Representative, Kaduna State</p>
	<p>The gap we are looking at here is from the parents sometimes the parents or the relations of the survivor will come to you and say they don't want you to continue with the case they want to go back home and solve their problem between them that's another that's up to us because we CSOs would love to see any perpetrator is being punished. We have a law that says anybody who rapes a girl is life imprisonment. And it has been happening. So, if they say they don't want sometimes, if the case doesn't come to women's rights, we have to fight for that. But if it has not come to us, then they can go on their own and do whatever they want. So that is it. That is another gap on our end.</p>	<p>KII, Male WRAPA Coordinator, Kebbi State</p>

<p><b>Poverty and Lack of Transportation to Cities</b></p>	<p>There is a need for f transportation that will be used to bring survivors to towns. Because most times, those that they raped are poor people, those that don't have they are looking for anything so it's another challenge but if governments will provide a budget for this, I think it will help and when sensitization carry out to mass sensitization I'm not talking about only in Kebbi, for Kebbi now we have done a lot of sensitization for GBV or gender violence against women and girls we've done that a lot but at the grassroots, there is a lot of gaps so many cases are not reporting here they are not bringing the reports here but we need to go down there and sensitize okay that is it.</p>	<p>FGD, 34-year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State</p>
<p><b>High cost of DNA test</b></p>	<p>Well for Kaduna state you know we have a clear penalty, there was a pronouncement by the governor for violence against women and girls. For males, if you are a perpetrator and it is proven beyond reasonable doubt you're going to be castrated. For females if you have if you do anything that has to do with harassment or rape and it was proven, your fallopian tube will be removed. Do you understand? So, it's been a difficult journey because how do you prove the unreasonable doubt? Even after identification, by the meeting. It's not easy to prove because we don't know how to do DNA gathering and most parents wash up the DNA before they even go to report. And so there is no evidence. And if we want to do DNA testing now, where do we do it? It's expensive. Unless the forensic lab. There was a time they opened a forensic lab here in Kaduna recently but it is too expensive, I don't think we can do free DNA so these are all the gaps. If a child can identify a perpetrator it goes a long way</p>	<p>KII, Female NGO Representative, Kaduna State</p>
<p><b>Limited Healthcare Providers and Services at SARC Centers</b></p>	<p>The first one is this religious and traditional exhibition, this misinterpretation of that. People are not there. Secondly, the technology, and trained people are not there. When you go to maybe a SARC center, there are no social workers. You see just nurses. Who is going to counsel there? Nurses cannot counsel. Then the judicial process is too slow. Adjournments and adjournments and adjournments. It doesn't help. It's not quick. And you have people who can use money to manipulate. So, it's also a gap that needs to be filled.</p>	<p>KII, 38-Year old NGO Representative, Kebbi State</p>
<p><b>Corruption</b></p>	<p>Our existing protection services for survivors of violence have no gap or limitation in our community. The only problems or gaps are in the implementation processes, ranging from police stations, courts, and correctional centers. In most cases, the government provides such policies but the police and judicial officials collect a certain amount of money from the suspects or their family and friends to solve the case at the police station level or to sway the case in court. For instance, A 13-year-old girl was raped by one of our influential people in the society. The police got bribed and, as a result, the police lied about the</p>	<p>FGD, 46-Year old Female, Kano State</p>

	girl's age, they said she is 18 and thus committed adultery, not raped by the wealthy man.	
	The judicial process is too slow. Adjournments and adjournments and adjournments. It doesn't help. It's not quick. And you have people who can use money to manipulate. So, it's also a gap that needs to be filled.	KII, 36-Year old NGO Representative, Kebbi State
	Some policies and laws are supportive, but there are gaps in implementation and enforcement. For example, while laws against domestic violence exist, they are often not enforced due to corruption or lack of resources, and also while the VAPP ACT has been passed its implementation still experiences setbacks due to political and societal reasons.	KII, WRO Representative, Sokoto State
<b>Lack of Coordination and Unified Effort</b>	The major problem that happens is that even if the violence happens, people don't even know where to go and meet with these organizations and report. There are no contacts that you will use to reach them. There is not much awareness, people don't know much about them and their functions. The government should put a contact person at every ward that will link survivors with these organizations. In some places, there are liaison officers but there are not many.	FGD, 38-Year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State

## Comparative Analysis of the Responses, Protection and Prevention Gaps in VAWG Services

This analysis compares the findings from the previous study conducted by WRAPA in 2021 across FCT, Jigawa, Plateau, and Katsina states with the recent field report findings (current trends) from Sokoto, Kano, Kebbi, Borno, and other states in Northern Nigeria.

- i. **Legal and Policy Framework:** The previous study revealed weak legal enforcement and low awareness of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), particularly among community leaders and law enforcement agencies. Only 14% of cultural and faith leaders demonstrated supportive attitudes toward gender equality, while 42% had been exposed to prevention messages. Recent findings indicate that while these challenges persist, specific statutory gaps have been identified, including Section 55 of the Penal Code, which permits the corrective beating of wives, and Section 127 of the Zamfara Sharia Code, which excludes marital rape. Furthermore, the low implementation of the VAPP Law is exacerbated by the lack of awareness among judges regarding its provisions, further weakening legal protection against violence.
- ii. **Corruption and Justice System Failures:** The previous study highlighted delays in court processes, which discouraged survivors from seeking justice, with only 20% accessing legal aid services, while many withdrew their cases due to financial constraints. Current findings reveal that these challenges are further compounded by widespread corruption among law enforcement officials, who accept bribes to alter evidence, and judicial officers, who contribute to case adjournments, prolonging trials and deterring survivors. As a result, there is growing advocacy for the establishment of special courts dedicated to handling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) cases to address these systemic inefficiencies.
- iii. **Service Delivery and Expertise Among Providers:** The previous study found limited knowledge of VAWG among law enforcement, health workers, and religious leaders. Only 57 survivors (12%) had been trained on their rights, and community leaders provided informal shelter in only 22% of cases. Recent findings indicate ongoing service gaps, particularly in health services and counseling. Service providers still lack training in trauma-informed care, and coordination among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) remains weak. This results in fragmented service delivery, where victims do not receive a comprehensive package of support.
- iv. **Rural Protection Services and Accessibility Issues:** The previous study found that VAWG services were primarily urban-centered, leaving IDPs and rural women without access to legal, medical, and psychosocial support. This issue persists, with IDPs in Borno and Katsina still lacking VAWG services entirely. Additionally, hard-to-reach areas make prompt reporting difficult, preventing timely interventions within the critical 48-hour window after an incident.
- v. **Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups:** The previous study noted that some vulnerable groups, including sexual minorities, women in IDP camps, and elderly women, were excluded from VAWG prevention efforts. This exclusion persists, particularly for women with disabilities and mentally ill women in the North East and North West. Additionally, gaps in referral mechanisms continue to hinder victims from accessing appropriate services.

- vi. **Lack of Coordination Among CSOs:** The previous study found that CSOs worked in isolation, lacking a unified approach to VAWG prevention and response. Recent data confirm that this lack of coordination persists, with CSOs continuing to operate independently rather than aligning their efforts. This fragmentation weakens overall service delivery and prevents victims from accessing seamless legal and psychosocial support.
- vii. **Security Challenges and INGOs Withdrawal:** The previous study found that insecurity caused by Boko Haram and banditry limited the work of VAWG-focused organizations. This situation has worsened, with INGOs withdrawing from high-risk areas, leaving victims without essential services in rural locations.
- viii. **Economic Empowerment for Survivors:** The previous study found that few economic empowerment programs existed for survivors, leaving them financially dependent and vulnerable to repeated violence. This challenge persists, as economic vulnerability remains high, with limited livelihood support options, further increasing survivors' dependence on perpetrators.
- ix. **Legal Aid and Survivor Support:** The previous study found that survivors faced financial barriers to legal services, as organizations like FIDA struggled with funding and logistics. This challenge persists, with FIDA now prioritizing indigent women due to financial constraints. As a result, many survivors still lack legal representation and are forced to abandon their cases.
- x. **Healthcare and Safe Spaces:** The previous study identified a shortage of safe spaces and inconsistent availability of healthcare professionals. This challenge persists, as many Safe spaces still lack testing kits, trained counselors, and medical personnel, limiting their ability to support survivors effectively. Kaduna State's CERSDOV also faces difficulties in making referrals due to poorly equipped SARC centers.
- xi. **Transportation and Financial Barriers:** The previous study found that survivors in rural areas were unable to access urban-based VAWG services due to transportation costs. This challenge persists, as the financial burden continues to prevent survivors from traveling for medical and legal services, leading to underreporting of cases.
- xii. **Implementation of the VAPP Act:** The previous study found low awareness and poor enforcement of the VAPP Act in many states. This issue persists, as implementation remains weak, with some states modifying the law to align with local customs. In Borno, the requirement for victims' consent before prosecution further creates barriers to justice.
- xiii. **Withdrawal of Cases by Families:** The previous study found that many VAWG cases were settled informally within families, undermining justice. This issue persists, as families continue to pressure survivors to withdraw cases before, they reach CSOs or legal authorities, further obstructing access to justice.
- xiv. **Urgent Needs for Victims:** The previous study found that survivors prioritized medical attention, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment. These needs remain urgent, with an increased emphasis on psychosocial support and sustainable economic opportunities to help survivors rebuild their lives.

**Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Gaps Established in Prevention, Protection and Response Needs**

<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Previous Findings</b>	<b>Current Trends (2024)</b>
<b>Legal Protection &amp; Policy Gaps</b>	Weak implementation of VAPP Law, low awareness	Section 55 of the Penal Code still allows wife beating, no marital rape protection
<b>Corruption in Justice System</b>	Case adjournments, lack of legal aid	Bribery in police and courts, delays in cases
<b>Service Provider Expertise</b>	Limited training for responders	Persistent lack of trauma-informed services
<b>Rural Protection Services</b>	Few VAWG services in rural areas	No IDP-specific VAWG support, hard-to-reach areas
<b>Coordination Among CSOs</b>	CSOs working independently	No unified efforts, fragmented support
<b>Insecurity Challenges</b>	Boko Haram and banditry limit services	INGOs withdrawing from rural areas
<b>Survivor Economic Support</b>	Few empowerment programs	Economic dependence increases vulnerability
<b>Legal Aid Barriers</b>	Few survivors access legal services	FIDA prioritizes only the most vulnerable
<b>Healthcare &amp; SARC Centers</b>	Limited trained professionals	Lack of essential medical testing kits
<b>Transportation &amp; Poverty</b>	Rural survivors struggle to access cities	Transportation barriers persist
<b>Implementation of VAPP Act</b>	Weak enforcement, poor awareness	Adjustments to law weaken its impact
<b>Case Withdrawals by Families</b>	Families settle cases informally	Survivors pressured to drop charges
<b>Urgent Needs for Survivors</b>	Medical aid, counseling, economic support	Increased need for trauma-informed care

## Theme Four: New Baseline for Prevention, Protection, and Response Needs

Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa (23 million girls and women married as children), and carries the third largest burden of child brides globally (3.3M), after India (26.6M) and Bangladesh (3.9M). At least 43% of girls in Nigeria are married before their 18th birthday, while 18.5% are married before they turn 15 so almost 1 in 5 girls. In the North West of the country, almost one in two girls (46%) is married by the age of 15. Child marriage is a key driver of challenges throughout northern Nigeria, leading to school drop-out and adolescent pregnancy which is also linked to high maternal mortality and malnutrition, among other issues. Child marriage is a leading cause of obstetric fistula which affects about 20,000 women and girls every year. In addition, child brides are 50% more likely to experience physical or sexual violence by their partners (Spotlight Initiative 2022).

Violence against women is preventable. The protection of women and girls starts with having an adequate legal framework that ensures gender equality and tackles any form of violence they may experience. Spotlight Initiative (2022) identified the following response strategies vital for preventing VAWG, these response strategies include; ensuring the passage and implementation of the VAPP law across all states, adopting a national strategy for the prevention of violence against women and girls to supporting effective implementation of existing laws. In addition, the policy advocates for developing communication campaigns at community levels and in all institutions to raise awareness of the issue, share reporting and support mechanisms that exist, and promote a culture that does not tolerate any form of violence against women and girls. It was confirmed that failure to prosecute rights offenders generates impunity which in turn fuels cycles of violence. Based on this, it was deemed imperative to establish accountability mechanisms, standing operating procedures, and safeguard principles to fast-track cases of sexual assault on women and children. This is achievable when there is an increase in budgetary allocation and timely release of funds

to address violence against women and girls to key services, especially the police. Furthermore, it was considered vital to engage religious and community leaders on gender inequitable social norms and behavior change to prevent sexual violence, child marriage, and FGM and promote access to services for survivors. As for teenage married girls, it was considered imperative to develop programs to support married girls and promote access to formal education (Spotlight Initiative 2022).

The World Health Organization (2010) proposes a new baseline for addressing VAWG, which states that legislation and policies that address wider socioeconomic inequalities can make a vital contribution to empowering women and improving their status in society; to creating cultural shifts by changing the norms, attitudes, and beliefs that support intimate partner and sexual violence; and to creating a climate of non-tolerance for such violence. The human rights of girls and women need to be respected, protected, and fulfilled as part of ensuring the well-being and rights of everyone in society. As a first step towards this, governments should honor their commitments in implementing most of the international legislation that addresses VAWG.

In addition, the WHO (2010) recommended School-based programs to prevent child sexual abuse by teaching children to recognize and avoid potentially sexually abusive situations. Similarly, Onyemelukwe (2021) proposes a new baseline that advocates for an inclusionary approach to stakeholder engagement, and public information in the North Central. In the North East and North West, sensitization/awareness programs were advocated for in schools and rural areas. This will make laws more effective, as such, important measures considered vital include; conducting massive awareness campaigns, engagement with stakeholders such as FIDA to enhance the domestication of necessary laws and allow for enhanced synergy of women-led organizations to champion the efficiency and

implementation of the law, training emergency response workers on handling VAWG cases, Simplification of the law into local languages, the establishment of referral centers and rehabilitation centers to effectively handle VAWG cases, Creation of more Safe Spaces, creation of strategic safe shelter space, creation of evacuation strategies for survivors, Provision of accessible legal representations, provision of

accessible psychosocial support. Establishing a new baseline for preventing, protecting against, and responding to VAWG is crucial for developing effective strategies and interventions. Participants identified various baseline needs in various aspects which were discussed below.

## **Introduction of Regulatory Measures in VAWG Cases**

To ensure justice for survivors of violence, study findings consider it essential to introduce robust regulatory measures. Participants highlighted maintaining the integrity of legal processes even when survivors decide to withdraw their cases. This will dislodge the current practice where cases are dropped if the survivor withdraws often results in perpetrators evading justice, which discourages other survivors from speaking out. Stakeholders recommend treating GBV cases between the government and the perpetrator, rather than

just between the survivor and the perpetrator. This implies that even if the survivor withdraws, the government can continue to prosecute the case. This is to reinforce the idea that GBV is a serious crime with societal implications, rather than just a personal matter. By taking over the prosecution of GBV cases, the government would be sending a strong message to survivors that cases will be taken seriously and pursued to the end. This is to encourage more survivors to report incidents of violence, knowing that cases would not be dismissed easily.

## **Direct Involvement of Women and Girls in Problem-Solving Efforts**

The direct involvement of women and girls in problem-solving efforts is a fundamental aspect of creating effective and sustainable solutions to the challenges they face, particularly in the context of violence and gender inequality. Empowering women and girls to actively participate in decision-making processes and problem-solving initiatives ensures that their unique perspectives, experiences, and insights are integrated into the development of strategies and interventions. This participatory approach not only enhances the relevance and efficacy of solutions but also fosters a sense of ownership and agency among those directly affected.

The study findings recommended the need for governmental and non-governmental bodies to prioritize the direct involvement of women and girls in efforts to address issues such as domestic violence and gender-based violence. The active participation of women and girls in problem-solving initiatives ensures that their voices are heard, their needs are understood, and the solutions developed are relevant and effective. This is in line with the recommendations by Onyemelukwe (2021) who advocated for the inclusion of representatives of all groups of women and girls in all intervention processes from design implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

## **Expanded Services for Survivors of VAWG**

Mobile clinics and outreaches breach the gap between the accessibility of facility-based clinics and the patient, especially survivors who may need to access medical facilities within 72 hours of being raped. To overcome the challenges of accessibility inherent to a facility-based health care system, some governments have developed

ad hoc mobile clinic programs to reach out to local communities, as it is seen as a key tool to accessing population at risk, those in the rural areas, where the medical facilities are either underfunded, ill-equipped or lack qualified personnel. Unfortunately, most of the states in Nigeria do not have mobile clinics or

outreaches, and the Primary Health Care Centers are not well equipped, leaving citizens to seek medical attention from unqualified persons (Ojukwu & Agu 2020).

In light of the ongoing relocation of people back to their ancestral homes in most conflict-prone states like Borno and Katsina, Zamfara, and Sokoto States, stakeholders highlighted an urgent need to expand support services to

ensure that affected communities receive the necessary assistance at their doorsteps. This is because the absence of such services hinders the reintegration process and leaves communities vulnerable to various challenges, including health, education, and economic instability. Stakeholders recommend the deployment of mobile units that can travel to remote and underserved areas, providing on-the-spot services and support to those who cannot easily access central locations.

## **Economic and Educational Empowerment**

Education is key to gender equality. In light of Nigeria's high out-of-school rates, efforts must be made to increase school access and retention for girls and boys. Unemployment disproportionately affects women, so investment in women and girls needs to be prioritized for them to contribute fully to strategic decision-making, economic growth, and national development. Private sector engagement needs to be targeted for the provision of skills, work opportunities, and banking services to women (especially in rural areas). Achieving financial inclusion in the 21st century requires increased women and girls' access to digital skills training, basic literacy, and numeracy. Political participation of women, by securing seats for them and by allowing them to stand as candidates in key electoral institutions and political parties is essential to ensuring the promotion of women and girls, especially the most vulnerable, in Nigeria (Spotlight Initiative 2022). This is an area where a gap was noted as limited girl-child education increases the chances of violence.

Study findings identified various initiatives that could promote self-reliance among housewives

### **Strengthening of Existing Laws**

Study findings revealed that effective implementation of the VAPP law requires active engagement and awareness among those responsible for its enforcement, including judges, lawyers, registrars, and other legal practitioners. It was noted that a significant number of these key stakeholders are either unaware of the VAPP law or do not have access

and this includes skill development, micro-enterprises, and financial literacy programs. The essence of such empowerment is that empowered women are better positioned to make decisions and contribute to preventing and responding to VAWG. Similarly, participants call for investment in educational programs and empowerment initiatives for girls to build resilience and capacity as education plays a key role in preventing VAWG by providing girls with the tools they need to advocate for themselves and others.

In addition, stakeholders call for empowerment programs aimed at families, particularly those targeting women and girls are considered essential. The programs should focus on enhancing the economic, social, and educational status of women, enabling them to contribute more effectively to the well-being of their families and communities. This is because empowering women not only improves their own lives but also strengthens the entire family unit, creating a more stable and supportive environment for all members.

to copies of the law. This lack of awareness and understanding poses a considerable challenge in applying the law effectively within the existing legal framework.

To address this issue and strengthen the implementation of the law, it was considered imperative to conduct targeted outreach and training sessions for legal practitioners and

sessions should focus on familiarizing stakeholders with the provisions of the VAPP law, its objectives, and the mechanisms for its enforcement. Ensuring that all relevant legal personnel are knowledgeable about the law will not only improve its application but also enhance the overall effectiveness of the legal system in protecting survivors of violence and holding perpetrators accountable.

Furthermore, participants recommended providing copies of the VAPP law to all relevant legal institutions and ensuring that these laws are integrated into their daily operations. This is to foster a more informed and responsive legal environment, ultimately contributing to the reduction of violence and the protection of vulnerable populations.

## Partnerships with other Organizations

To ensure sustainability in existing protection and prevention services, study findings advocated partnership with the various organizations and the traditional institutions. This can be effective when dedicated

individuals are recruited to report cases of violence to relevant authorities. A sustained collaboration is established between the local and international organizations in providing important services to survivors of violence.

## Need for Technology-Based Solution

While technology holds significant potential for advancing efforts against VAWG, many organizations and centers in the study areas have yet to fully harness its capabilities beyond the use of traditional hotlines. Although hotlines serve as a critical tool for providing immediate support and assistance, their application represents a relatively narrow aspect of technology's broader potential in combating VAWG. Technology like phones, computers, and forensic laboratories can play a vital role in enhancing prevention, protection, and response services for the survivors of violence. The provision of forensic laboratories with sophisticated machines can reduce difficulties in providing evidence in the cases of sexual gender-based violence.

providing concrete, scientific evidence to support the identification and prosecution of offenders. This would not only help in securing justice for the survivors but also serve as a deterrent to potential perpetrators. Participants alleged that the introduction of DNA testing at the SARC would represent a critical advancement in the fight against sexual violence, ensuring that cases are resolved with greater accuracy and contributing to the overall credibility and efficiency of the justice process.

Study findings revealed that the absence of DNA testing capabilities at the SARC centers is a significant limitation in accurately identifying perpetrators of sexual violence. Participants lamented that having access to DNA technology would greatly enhance the effectiveness of the center's services by

Additionally, technology, particularly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been playing a pivotal role in the GBV centers in Katsina specifically. WRAPA and GBV centers have been utilizing the technology in data collection and storage in the state. Particularly an Open Data Kit (ODK) called Kobo Collect and a server for keeping the records of survivors and their activities. Mobile telecommunication has aided the prompt reporting of VAWG cases to WRAPA, GBV center, Police, faith, and community leaders.

## High Cost of DNA Testing

Since there are stringent penalties for perpetrators of VAWG, the primary difficulty lies in proving guilt beyond reasonable doubt. The process of collecting and preserving evidence, such as DNA, is fraught with challenges. Many parents wash away the evidence before reporting, and the high cost of DNA testing, especially with the recent establishment of a forensic lab in Kaduna, limits

accessibility. Without affordable and accessible forensic services, proving cases becomes even more complex, leaving many cases without the necessary evidence to support legal actions. Most NGOs are financially incapable of offering free DNA testing services, the absence of these DNA tests usually delays justice and most parents usually get irritated and abandon such cases in the law courts.

## **Establishment of Community-Based Initiatives in Reducing Domestic Violence and Rape**

Community-based initiatives are essential in addressing and reducing incidents of domestic violence and rape. The active participation of communities plays a critical role in shaping behaviors and enforcing social norms that discourage such acts. Stakeholders highlighted that without the involvement of the community, efforts to curb these issues may not be effective. The collective response of a community can significantly influence individual behavior, particularly in cases where an individual is known to be abusive. For instance, when a community is aware of an individual engaging in domestic violence, their reaction can pressure the perpetrator to change their behavior as collective efforts of the community or

community reaction can hold individuals accountable and prompt behavioral changes.

The study recommended community shaming of perpetrators but pointed out the complexities involved in community shaming. While shaming a person can have the unintended consequence of alienating them from the community, shaming the behavior itself was rather proved to be more effective, while still allowing perpetrators to remain part of the community. This was considered to be a more effective approach as it helps maintain the community's integrity while encouraging positive behavior change.

## **Incorporation of Traditional Structures into Bureaucratic Processes**

To effectively strengthen our structures for addressing issues such as domestic violence and rape, stakeholders deemed it crucial to integrate traditional structures into existing bureaucratic processes. Stakeholders emphasized that the current bureaucratic system, which often relies heavily on international best practices and standardized approaches, has not yielded significant results in the context of domestic violence and rape. This is primarily because it fails to incorporate the beliefs, values, and cultural practices that people in communities hold dear. To achieve this, Women for Women International (n.d) advocated that government and stakeholders should conduct regular meetings with civil society to prioritize VAW issues, look into and address harmful traditional

practices that affect women in the community, and integrate civil society participation in both policy development and implementation.

Participants argued that traditional structures, such as the roles of pastors, imams, and traditional rulers, are vital because these leaders have a deep understanding of their communities. They are trusted figures who can influence behavior and ensure that the policies and strategies resonate with the local population. Unlike the often distant and generalized policies that may work in other regions or countries, these traditional leaders are more attuned to the specific needs and dynamics of their communities.

## **Internal Revenue Generation for Protection Organizations**

In the realm of protection organizations dedicated to supporting survivors of violence and advocating for their rights, the challenge of maintaining financial stability and expanding

operational capacity was a significant concern. Traditionally, these organizations relied heavily on external funding sources, such as grants and donations, which, while crucial, often proved to

be unpredictable and insufficient for sustaining long-term initiatives.

Participants averred that it is essential for protection organizations to establish mechanisms for internal revenue generation to ensure sustainability and reduce dependence on donor agencies. This is because developing a reliable internal funding strategy can provide stability and flexibility, particularly in times

when donor support is limited. Stakeholders highlighted potential methods for generating internal revenue including investments, fundraising events, contributions, and requests for government support. This is because demonstrating substantial self-generated funds can also enhance the organization's appeal to donors, as it reflects financial stability and commitment.

## **Establishment of VAWG Complaint Centre**

Various states implemented various protection and prevention services for survivors of violence through government and human rights organizations such as WRAPA, which effectively support and protect survivors. However, there is a significant gap in public awareness, as many community members are unaware of existing policies and programs. Based on significant findings, participants advocated for establishing VAWG complaint centers at both the state and local government levels to facilitate easier reporting and access to support for survivors. This is because most survivors from rural areas mostly find it difficult to transport themselves to the state capital to report cases, and where cases had been successfully reported, court attendance by survivors comes with hindrances due to financial incapability. Establishing VAWG complaint centers across all LGAs would

improve awareness among community members and improve reported cases of violence.

In addition, participants deemed it critical to strengthen the protection and prevention mechanisms for VAWG by enhancing financial, human, and material resources. Essential resources for such enhancement include legal and social workers, laboratory facilities and equipment, and dedicated women's rights offices at both the state and local government levels. Establishing such facilities and providing ambulances for rapid response can significantly improve the efficiency of addressing cases of sexual violence and other forms of female brutality. To achieve this, an effective mobilization and allocation of these resources require collaboration with relevant stakeholders at the grassroots level.

## **Increased Awareness of Reporting Cases of VAWG**

The most pressing needs for prevention, protection, and response services for survivors of VAWG include heightened awareness and sensitization regarding the importance of available services as most survivors are inundated on available services thus the need for improved awareness. This can be effectively achieved through collaboration with community and religious leaders, as well as various media channels such as radio, television, magazines, newspapers, and social media. In addition, stakeholders call for establishing vocational centers for survivors of violence to help mitigate emotional and psychological issues while enhancing their living standards within society.

## Improved Funding VAWG Cases

Securing adequate funding for VAWG cases is crucial for addressing the needs of survivors and ensuring the effectiveness of protection and support services. Improved funding can significantly enhance the capacity of organizations to provide comprehensive services, implement preventive measures, and support survivors in their journey to recovery. Study findings affirmed a significant need for essential services for survivors of VAWG. Transportation was considered to be a major hindrance, often forcing CSOs to cover costs out of their own pockets to ensure survivors reach hospitals and law courts. This situation underscored the necessity for government

intervention. Participants recommended that the Ministry of Women's Affairs allocate a specific budget for gender-based violence, with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Budget also incorporating provisions for these cases in their financial plans. Such budget allocations would not only ease the burden on CSOs but also streamline the government's response to VAWG.

Table 5 is a table displaying a summary of the new baseline for prevention, protection and response needs.

**Table 5: Summary of the New Baseline for Prevention, Protection and Response Needs**

<b>PREVENTION</b>	<b>PROTECTION</b>	<b>RESPONSE NEEDS</b>
<b>EDUCATION &amp; AWARENESS</b>	<b>LEGAL &amp; LAW ENFORCEMENT MEASURES</b>	<b>SURVIVOR SUPPORT &amp; SERVICES</b>
<b>Educating women because marriage leads to abuse.</b>	Full implementation of the VAPP Law.	Emergency response: easy, fast, accessible support for survivors.
<b>Awareness of rights by women: continuous education/orientation to enable them to know their rights.</b>	Sensitization of the public on the implementation of the VAPP Law.	Reporting of VAWG cases.
<b>Sensitization, education, and awareness to policymakers and citizens—especially women.</b>	Interpretation of the VAPP Law into local languages for better understanding.	Creation of support groups in the community.
<b>Strengthening of GBV programmes in schools by training school counsellors.</b>	Training of security operatives on VAWG laws.	Economic empowerment for survivors housed in safe spaces.
<b>Training of youths and women as peer educators and advocates.</b>	Collaborating with security agencies, the Ministry of Women Affairs, and FIDA.	Psychosocial and medical support in safe spaces.
<b>Capacity building for women and girls to know, recognize, and speak out when violated.</b>	Capacity building vide training on handling GBV cases for law enforcement agencies.	Capacity building training for service providers on counseling skills as it affects survivors.

Advocacy to hard-to-reach communities (grassroots) to understand, recognize, and speak out when violated.	Establishment of special courts to handle VAWG cases.	<b>ACCOUNTABILITY &amp; JUSTICE</b>
<b>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT &amp; INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT</b>	Provision of legal aid.	No compensation for survivors in the VAPP Law—need to strategize compensatory means (i.e., VAPP Law should include compensation for survivors).
Women representation in traditional councils in northern Nigeria.	<b>SECURITY &amp; PROTECTION OF SURVIVORS</b>	Thorough investigation of VAWG cases.
Gender-based officers in traditional institutions.	Leveraging technology to protect whistleblowers and survivors.	Revealing the identity of the victim while concealing the identity of the perpetrators should be changed vice versa.
Community engagement in the implementation of VAWG laws.	Use of technology for reporting and tracking abuse.	<b>FUNDING &amp; SUSTAINABILITY</b>
Support community-based initiatives in ending VAWG.	Creation of safe spaces for survivors in society.	Fundraising to strengthen the activities of NGOs working on GBV.
Strengthening institutional frameworks (e.g., WoR, Hisbah, traditional rulers, religious leaders).	Trust in service providers by survivors and the community.	
Re-orientation of religious and traditional leaders on the need for right teachings that will enable a break-away from patriarchal stereotypes.	Community response structures (referral and aid structures).	
Reconciliation of Shariah and conventional laws.	Establishing community-based confidential reporting channels.	
<b>POLICY &amp; LEGAL FRAMEWORK</b>		
Harmonizing religious and secular laws to address gender-based violence.		
Addressing the root causes of gender social norms that encourage gender violence.		

## Matrix of Voices: New Baseline for Prevention, Protection, and Response Needs

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANT
<b>New Baseline for Prevention and Response Needs</b>	Yeah, the strategies I think maybe they should be a kind of regulation or regulatory measures. To see even if maybe a perpetrator was reported and at the end of the day the survivor decides to withdraw, then the government should come in and say this thing is between the government and the citizens. Yes, even if the survivor withdraws, the case continues. So, by so doing, the government would be encouraging the survivors to speak out. To speak for their justices.	KII, 49-year-old Female CBO Representative, Borno State
	Yes, certainly there are gaps because everybody is working according to his own. So, there is no coordination between these activities. Unless and until among the INGOs because they are working as a team. I think they have maybe a network or something. But within the civil society organization, civil society space, we are working in parallel. So, if my organization is working towards this direction, another organization is working towards this direction. And there are no coordination or referral processes among us. So, there is a huge gap.	KII, 49-year-old Female CBO Representative, Borno State
	They don't go to school because they don't know the importance of acquiring knowledge.	FGD, 37-year-old Female Participant, Sokoto State
<b>Technology-based identification of perpetrators</b>	So, we don't have a DNA machine, so that you know the actual perpetrator. And that will help a lot in the centers	KII, 43-year-old Female Government Representative, Borno State.
	Technology like phones, computers, and forensic laboratories can play a vital role in enhancing prevention, protection, and response services for the survivors of violence. The provision of forensic laboratories with sophisticated machines can reduce difficulties in providing evidence in the cases of sexual gender-based	KII, 42-year-old Government Representative, Kebbi State.
<b>Economic and Educational Empowerment</b>	The survivors of VAWG need multiple supports urgently in terms of counseling, education, legal aid, housing, and food, medical, economic among others. For instance, economic support to the survivors is necessary for better living standards. I know a divorced woman with 3 children living in her father's house. The husband does not provide the needed resources for his children. Therefore, such divorced women need urgent financial support to continue taking care responsibilities of themselves and their children	KII, 38-Year-old Woman of Resilience, Kano State

<b>Partnerships with other Organizations</b>	<p>Partnership and collaboration foster great achievement because when all partners that have the same objective come together to address it. For example, now we talk to NGOs, private sectors, ministry, and government to come together for the government in terms of prosecution will help a lot in fighting against VAWG. So when these bodies work together they work in synergy. You have a singular objective that will be very effective.</p>	<p>KII, 49-year-old Female CBO Representative, Gombe State</p>
<b>Increased Awareness of Reporting Cases of VAWG</b>	<p>The most pressing need for prevention, protection, and response services for survivors of VAWG in our community is increasing awareness and sensitization about the importance of prevention, protection, and response services for survivors of VAWG. These can only be achieved via media (radio, television, magazines, newspapers, social media, and more). The provision of vocational centers to the survivors of violence may reduce emotional and psychological problems and improve survivors' living standards in society</p>	<p>KII, 38-Year-old Female Woman of Resilience, Kano State.</p>
<b>Direct Involvement of Women and Girls in Problem-Solving Efforts</b>	<p>Governmental and non-governmental bodies should directly involve women and girls in problem-solving efforts. Families' empowerment programs, especially those targeting women should be mounted.</p>	<p>FGD, 32 Year-old Female Participant, Jigawa State</p>
<b>Internal Revenue Generation for Protection Organizations</b>	<p>As I earlier mentioned, WRAPA as an organization needs to provide internal revenue generation so that they can equally depend on themselves when the donor agencies are not there even when they are there you can provide support, because there are times when the donor agencies will like to see what they have in place to provide, by the time you have a substantial amount of contribution to make, they feel good to contribute too. So you need to have internally generated revenue and you can do so in many ways like through investments, fundraising, contributions, requests from government, etc.</p>	<p>KII, WRAPA Coordinator, Kaduna State.</p>
<b>Improved Funding for VAWG Cases</b>	<p>There is a need for medication for the children. There are those people who render services there, they need to be looked at. There is an issue of transportation that I have mentioned before, which is one of the hindrances of these cases, that we have been hiding. Even sometimes CSOs serve to remove from their pocket and give to the survivors or survivors to go to the hospital. So that is why we are calling on the government. There's a lot of things that we need. You see, in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, if in their budget they have a budget for gender-based violence, the Ministry of Justice also should have one because cases are reportedly going to their side. Even the</p>	<p>FGD, 36 Year-old Female Participant, Kebbi State</p>

	Ministry of Budget, where generates a budget plan so even then if all those things get in the budget I think things will be easier for even the government.	
<b>Establishment of VAWG Complaint Centre</b>	Protection and prevention services are currently available in our state. This is because the government and Human Rights Organizations (WRAPA and more) introduce multiple programs to protect and prevent VAWG. The programs are effective in providing support and protection to the survivors. The gap that needs to be addressed is that government and Human Rights Organizations should put more emphasis on awareness and sensitizing people about the existing policies and programs because most of the community members have less awareness of the existing policies and programs. There is also the need to provide VAWG complaint centers in each state and local government so that survivors of VAWG can report such cases easily.	KII, 38-Year-old Woman of Resilience, Kano State
<b>Human and Material needed to strengthen protection and prevention mechanisms and strategies</b>	One there is a need for finance. So, you need transportation, three, you need shelter. Fourth, you need lawyers, you need to pay to have standing lawyers and cater for all these. Then, five you need well-furnished counseling rooms. You need a post-therapy visit, that is follow-up, the finance for the follow-up because at times you finished counseling and the person is back to his society and you need to go and see how what is happening. And there is a need for resources to go and sensitize the village. Yeah, we need the resources to go and do the sensitization.	KII, 36 Year-old Male NGO Representative, Kebbi State
	The gaps we need to address are, number one, transportation. Because sometimes a case will come from Zuru, Yauri, Argungu, and the rest. The family will complain to you they don't have money to transport the survivor to the state capital where she will get all the health prevention. So, you the CSOs, you have to contribute all, you have to source for money that you help that child. That's why we are calling on the government to create space in the budget so that it will take care of all the survivors of any type of gender-based violence in the states.	KII, Male WRAPA Coordinator, Kebbi State

## Human and Material Resources Needed to Strengthen Protection and Prevention Mechanisms and Strategies

Several essential resources were identified as critical for strengthening the support and prevention mechanisms for VAWG.

**First**, stakeholders highlighted a pressing need for financial support to ensure that all aspects of VAWG response mechanisms are adequately funded. This includes transportation, which is critical for bringing survivors, often from rural or underserved areas, to towns or facilities where they can access necessary services. Without reliable transportation, survivors may be unable to seek help, particularly in cases where the survivors are impoverished and lack the means to reach urban centers. In Kebbi State specifically, stakeholders highlighted that impoverished survivor from rural areas in Ngaski, Yauri, Zuru, and Argungu LGA usually find it difficult to incur transport costs to Birnin Kebbi to access services or attend court proceedings. In most circumstances, it is the CSOs that usually contribute transport fares for these survivors to access these services.

**Secondly**, shelter was considered a crucial resource as many survivors of VAWG needed a safe space to escape from their abusive environments. This necessitates establishing and maintaining well-equipped shelters where survivors can receive immediate care and protection. This is because shelter centers offer more than just a safe place to stay; they provide access to comprehensive services such as medical care, counseling, and legal assistance.

**Thirdly**, legal support was equally considered crucial. This includes hiring and retaining standing lawyers who can offer consistent legal representation for survivors. Legal challenges often arise due to the high cost of hiring lawyers, which many survivors cannot afford. As such, having dedicated lawyers who can work on cases of VAWG without financial constraints was highlighted to be essential to

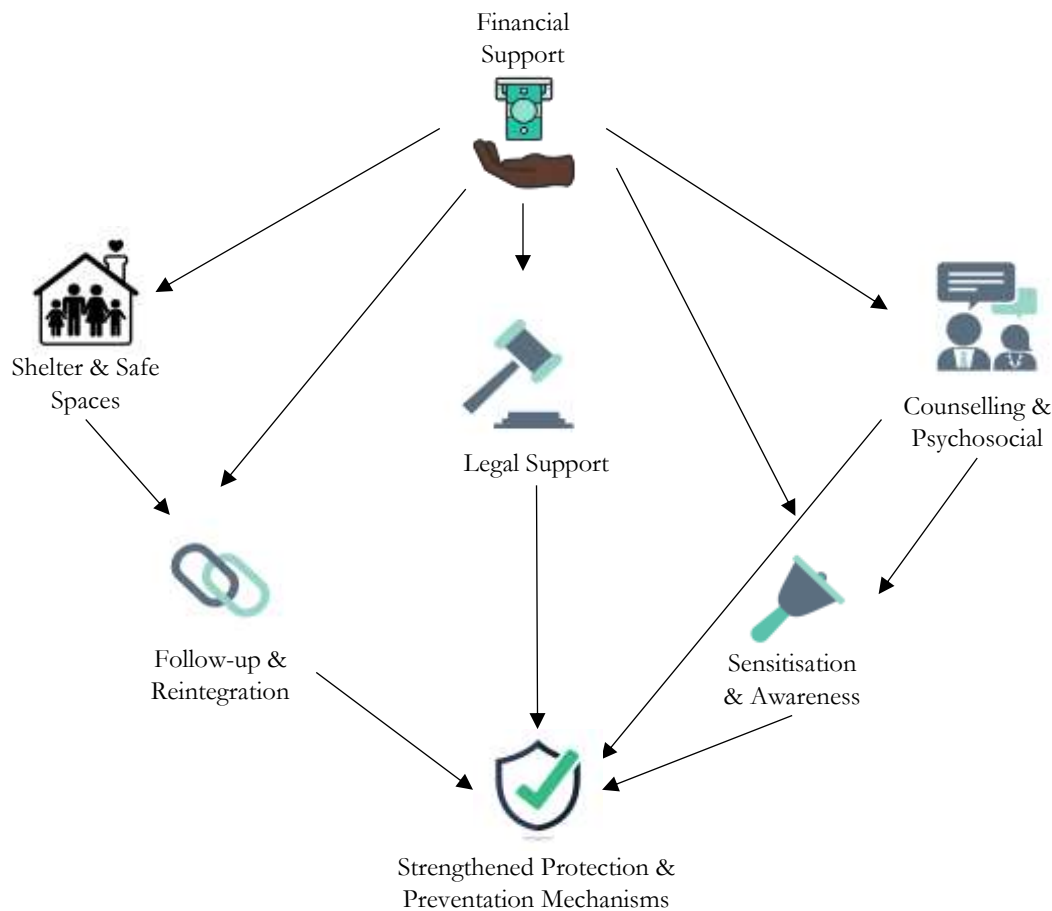
ensure that survivors receive the justice they deserve.

**Fourthly**, well-furnished counseling rooms were equally considered necessary to provide survivors with a comfortable and safe environment where they could receive psychological support. Counseling is a critical component of the healing process, and the environment in which it is provided can significantly impact its effectiveness. This is why stakeholders agitated for well-equipped rooms and the necessary tools and resources to facilitate effective counseling sessions.

**Fifthly**, follow-up services were considered crucial, or post-therapy visits, to ensure that survivors continue to receive support even after they have left the shelter or counseling environment. This follow-up is crucial in helping survivors reintegrate into society and ensuring that they do not return to abusive situations. This is why participants advised allocating resources to enable these visits, which may include transportation and financial support for the personnel involved.

**Lastly**, resources are also needed to conduct sensitization and awareness campaigns in rural and remote areas. Many cases of VAWG go unreported because of a lack of awareness about the available services and the rights of survivors. These sensitization efforts should focus on educating communities about the importance of reporting violence, the services available to survivors, and the legal protections in place. These campaigns can help reduce the stigma associated with reporting violence and encourage more survivors to come forward.

## Conceptual Framework for Strengthening Protection & Prevention Mechanisms for VAWG



From the conceptual framework depicted in the diagram, it is discernible that financial support serves as the core enabler for all VAWG protection and prevention mechanisms, thus ensuring access to transportation, shelters, legal aid, counseling, and awareness campaigns. In Kebbi State, survivors from rural areas face significant financial barriers in accessing essential services, making funding critical. Shelters provide immediate protection and comprehensive services such as medical care, psychosocial support, and legal aid, while legal representation ensures survivors receive justice

without financial constraints. Counseling and psychosocial support help survivors recover from trauma and reintegrate into society, with follow-up services preventing relapse into abusive situations. Sensitization and awareness campaigns play a crucial role in encouraging reporting and reducing stigma, ultimately minimizing the need for extensive intervention services. A well-integrated approach to these components strengthens VAWG prevention and response mechanisms, ensuring holistic support for survivors.

### Theme Five: Impact of WRAPA Past Projects

WRAPA has executed various projects, especially projects targeted towards addressing VAWG in Nigeria in general and north-western Nigeria in particular. Some of these projects include baseline and end-line evaluation on the VAWG accountability project (2020 and 2022);

A gendered social accountability tool kit for women's rights advocates (2023); An impact on connecting voices against child marriage project in Katsina (2023) among others. Most of these projects had impacted the lives of community members, especially women and girls.

The VAWG accountability project was implemented by WRAPA in three states; Jigawa, Katsina, and Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) employing baseline and end-line evaluation techniques. Both evaluation techniques revealed that VAWG exists in the affected communities of the sampled states and these include rape, neglect, battery, abandonment, and denial of rights. Unfortunately, due to poor knowledge of their rights and support services available, fear of being stigmatized, and ignorance, including poor accountability mechanisms for perpetrators, survivors have maintained a culture of silence for too long, while perpetrators were not brought to the book thereby evading the consequential penalty for their act. The implementation of the VAWG accountability project accounted for positive changes in the various communities. This is rooted in the fact that the end-line evaluation shows a significant improvement over the result obtained in the baseline in the areas of awareness creation, and providing access to

support services for survivors, through co-creation efforts of government and non-government, civil society organizations and the communities. The report shows that 94.6% of the respondents were aware of WRAPA intervention as an organization in providing support services to survivors of violence. These support services include referral and support for medical treatment, support for medical documentation to aid legal proceedings, referral and support for police and justice services, support for court proceedings that protect the identity of the survivor as well as informing survivors of their rights. Furthermore, the platform provided by WRAPA has helped break the culture of silence by women and girls, thus allowing them to speak of any form of violence vented towards them by men (WRAPA 2022). Study findings showed that most stakeholders come to be aware of WRAPA either through their various intervention programs or as employees in the organization.

## **WRAPA Initiatives aimed at advancing women's rights and VAWG protection**

The Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative is one of the leading organizations at the forefront of advancing women's rights and combating violence through a diverse range of initiatives. With a commitment to promoting legal advocacy, providing survivor support, and raising public awareness, WRAPA works to address gender-

based violence and empower women and girls. WRAPA employs a comprehensive approach to addressing VAWG which integrates legal aid, capacity building, sensitization, and policy development to foster systemic change and enhance protection for those affected by violence. Some of these initiatives were discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

### **Protection and Empowerment**

In 2016 in Borno State specifically, WRAPA launched a significant media awareness campaign aimed at raising public consciousness about women's rights and empowerment. This initiative was executed in collaboration with the Women's Empowerment and Development Initiative, with WRAPA commissioning the project to enhance its reach and impact across the state. A jingle was created and strategically aired during prime time on various media outlets to ensure maximum audience engagement. The campaign successfully generated widespread awareness, with numerous individuals responding positively to the message. Feedback from listeners was carefully recorded and reported back to WRAPA, providing valuable insights into the campaign's effectiveness.

### **Provision of Legal Aid Services**

WRAPA efforts have made a significant impact in most states, especially in ensuring survivors get the required justice. This impact is particularly evident through the provision of Legal Aid Services services to vulnerable survivors of violence, with a strong focus on

women and girls. The services offered by WRAPA include legal assistance, medical care, and counseling, among others, which have contributed to the support and protection of these survivors.

## **Impact of WRAPA Initiative**

WRAPA initiatives significantly impacted the empowerment of women and girls by raising awareness of their roles and rights within society. WRAPA efforts effectively heightened consciousness about the importance of women's participation and protection, leading to increased advocacy and action within various communities. Despite not having direct significant physical contributions in most states, the support extended indirectly to survivors of violence played a pivotal role in shaping understanding and approach to women's rights advocacy. As a direct result of WRAPA influence, certain philanthropists were inspired by similar organizations dedicated to supporting

women in their pursuit of justice and protection.

In addition, WRAPA usually settles legal fees for survivors of violence and ensures all survivors get access to justice while perpetrators incur the full wrath of the law depending on their offenses. Facilitating the adoption of the VAPP law is a critical step toward strengthening legal frameworks and enhancing protections for survivors of violence. Stakeholders acknowledged the pivotal role played by WRAPA in the adoption and implementation of the VAPP law in Jigawa and Kebbi States. This effort was considered crucial in advancing this landmark legislation

## **Facilitation of Adoption of Child Rights and VAPP Law**

The persistent efforts of the WRAPA advocacy team have led to a gradual shift in attitudes among citizens. By clearly communicating the intention of most policies and laws targeted towards aligning laws with cultural and religious values, rather than imposing foreign ideals, WRAPA has been able to change the narrative. This resulted in a more receptive and understanding community, contributing to the successful progress made in the domestication of the Child Rights Act and VAPP law in most of the targeted states. The VAPP law represents a comprehensive legislative effort to address various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. This demonstrates WRAPA substantial role in inspiring grassroots initiatives and expanding the network of support for women and girls.

## **Ways WRAPA Can Reinvigorate Positive Impacts**

Stakeholders suggested that if WRAPA were to re-establish itself and strengthen its presence, it could greatly benefit from partnering with networks of women-led organizations. By liaising with these networks and offering support to build their capacities, WRAPA could ensure that its legacy endures, even if the organization itself was no longer active. Such collaborations would not only empower local organizations but would also help WRAPA

name and influence remain impactful for years to come.

Stakeholders further identified various ways WRAPA could significantly enhance its impact, this involves refining its strategic planning through the development of policies that address and prevent corrupt practices among police and court officials. Effective monitoring and evaluation of these officials' duties was

considered crucial as it will ensure they discharge their responsibilities efficiently and fairly. Participants further advised WRAPA to intensify its orientation and education efforts to broaden its reach and achieve a greater impact. This could be accomplished through more frequent awareness campaigns, sensitization programs, advocacy, and collaborations with key stakeholders, including faith leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, journalists, legal professionals, health professionals, and even influencers like footballers and comedians.

In addition, strengthening partnerships and collaborations with other organizations and stakeholders was equally considered important. WRAPA was advised to consider recruiting more staff and establishing sub-branches at the

state, local government, and political ward levels. Sponsoring grassroots programs and allocating additional funds to CBOs and CSOs would empower these organizations to implement programs directly within society, thereby amplifying WRAPA influence and effectiveness.

Furthermore, in enhancing WRAPA initiatives, stakeholders suggested engaging imams and pastors in spreading the organization's message. Recognizing that most Muslims attend Friday prayers, participants recommended that WRAPA collaborate with Imams across various local governments. Similarly, involving pastors to share the message in their sermons would help strengthen WRAPA efforts in implementing its programs and raising awareness on a larger scale.

## **Case Study of WRAPA Project Beneficiary**

A participant shared an account of how WRAPA initiatives have positively impacted individuals in their community. A notable example involved a woman in Kebbi State who sought WRAPA assistance in ending her marriage due to prolonged abuse. WRAPA facilitated her case by involving the Council of Ulama (Islamic scholars), respecting the religious and cultural framework within which the issue was situated. Although the woman's husband initially won the case, WRAPA supported her through the appeal process, eventually leading to a court ruling that allowed her to separate from her husband. Currently, the woman is living independently, having achieved the outcome she desired. Additionally, WRAPA has provided other forms of support, such as empowering 120 children in various communities by providing uniforms and shoes for their education. The participant highlighted that WRAPA efforts extend to a wide range of cases, offering help wherever possible and seeking alternative solutions when necessary. This testimony confirms the multifaceted impact WRAPA has had in advocating for and supporting vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children.

## **Other Relevant Issues and Recommendations**

In addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and promoting gender equality, other additional relevant issues emerge that influence the effectiveness of interventions and support systems. Beyond the primary focus areas, there are various interconnected challenges and systemic factors that impact the overall response to VAWG. These relevant issues were discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

The situation of IDPs returning to their communities remains critical, particularly for women, girls, and children who are highly vulnerable. There is a pressing need for

increased attention and support for these groups. Organizations must prioritize providing the necessary assistance to ensure their safety and well-being as they reintegrate into their communities.

This support is essential to help them rebuild their lives in a secure and stable environment. Stakeholders equally call for more sponsorship to re-launch the WRAPA Women of Resilience program.

## Challenges Confronting WRAPA

Study findings noted that WRAPA as an organization faced several significant challenges that hindered its operations and ability to effectively carry out its activities. One of the primary challenges was the lack of a permanent office space. In most states, the organization has been operating out of temporary office spaces, essentially squatting. This lack of stability in office space posed logistical difficulties and impacted the organization's ability to function smoothly.

Another major challenge identified by stakeholders is the delay in the release of funds from partners or donors. When planning activities such as training sessions, sensitization campaigns, or other events, the organization often encounters delays in receiving the necessary funds. This delay usually creates a cascade of problems, particularly when the organization has already made arrangements. The funds would sometimes take so long to be released and usually disrupt scheduled activities.

### Matrix of Voices: Impact of WRAPA Past Projects

THEME	RESPONSES	PARTICIPANT
<b>Creation of a Jingle Aired in Radio Stations</b>	Yeah, I think I have facilitated one of their jingles. A jingle was made by WRAPA that was around 2016 if I'm not mistaken. That was when I was working with one organization, Women's Empowerment and Development Initiative. So, I think WRAPA gave the project to that organization. So, it was a jingle to be aired in the media houses in the state. So, being a media person, I was working with that organization then. So, I was the one that handled it and it was being aired and gave them the prime time where people do listen to WRAPA and recorded their feedback to them.	KII, 49-year-old Female CSO Representative, Borno State
<b>Provision of Legal Aid Services</b>	In my perceptive, WRAPA efforts have an impact on our society. This is because the organization provides <i>Legal Aid Services</i> to the vulnerable survivors of violence with more emphasis on women and girls. Some of the services provided by WRAPA to the survivors of violence include legal, medical, counseling, and more.	KII, 42-years old Female Government Representative, Kano State
<b>Impact of WRAPA Initiative</b>	I knew WRAPA and its initiatives aimed at advancing women's rights and protection against violence. I experienced these impacts through my lawyer when my husband divorced me and sold my house to someone (third party). The lawyer filed a case before the court of law and called for WRAPA attention to give me urgent support in the case. At that time I was receiving legal support from WRAPA through the Kano state coordinator (Fatima Lawan Aliyu). Since then that time, I have been benefiting from WRAPA efforts.	KII, 38-year old Woman of Resilience, Kano State.

	<p>I cannot mention names but I know WRAP has followed 2 or 3 cases to the logical conclusion and the accused were punished. WRAPA has changed the mentality and orientation of our people towards reporting GBV cases which were not like that before they started operation in our communities. There is a 100 percent increase in the report of GBV cases in Katsina State as a result of their advocacy.</p>	<p>KII, 49-year old Male Religious Leader, Katsina State.</p>
	<p>I told you that WRAPA should use Imams when they talk to him Imam on Friday around 95 percent of Muslims go to mosques. So, they speak to imams in different local governments. One government picked them today. In the whole local government, all the imams will come together, and then give them a sensitization. Then, the government should make sure that they help Wrapa to take this uh what do you call this uh Wrapa message. Let this Imam put it in their sermons and pastors. Then, put it in their sermons on Friday. People listen to these Imams. So, it will help them, help Wrapa to implement a lot of things.</p>	<p>KII, 34-year old Male NGO Representative, Kebbi State.</p>
<p><b>Other Relevant Issues and Recommendations</b></p>	<p>I only want to say that we need more attention to this, especially IDPs who are taken back to their various communities because they are very vulnerable, they need more support. Yes, from your organization, more especially women and girls and children. Okay, ma'am. Thank you very much for your time.</p>	<p>KII, 49-year-old Female Government Official, Borno State</p>

# Section Four: Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations

Noting the place of first-hand information in ascertaining the degree of relationships between variables and coupled with the nature of the problem to be studied, the study was participatory research employing qualitative techniques. This involved information generated from experts in the field of VAWG. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were used to elicit information. Community residents, notable post-graduate, graduate students, experts in the

field of VAWG, and lecturers with relevant experience in qualitative interview facilitation were recruited and trained as Research Assistants from each of the sampled states. Participants were mobilized with the assistants of WRAPA state focal persons who served as contact persons to the Research Assistants. The Research Assistants were supervised and monitored by the WRAPA technical consultant to ensure successful and hitch-free field engagement.

## Summary of Significant Findings

This seeks to identify the current gaps in the protection of women and girls against violence and to develop a new baseline of prevention, protection, and response needs. The study was carried out in ten states; Sokoto, Katsina,

Jigawa, Kebbi, Kano, Kaduna, Zamfara, Borno, Gombe and Niger State. In the subsequent paragraph is the summary of significant findings from the study.

## Socio-Demographic Patterns of Life and Challenges Faced by Women and Girls

The study found that women primarily engage in domestic duties, small-scale trading, and agricultural activities, with teenage girls enrolled in schooling, though many lack formal education. This limited scope for personal and professional development is closely tied to low educational attainment among women and girls, particularly in rural areas. Cultural and traditional beliefs significantly influence women's participation in the workforce, with in-laws and husbands often restricting work opportunities. Despite some support for home-based businesses, certain professions are deemed inappropriate for women due to cultural norms. In addition, safety concerns, particularly in states like Kaduna, pose significant challenges to the freedom of movement for women and girls, contributing to their vulnerability. The study identified several risky behaviors by parents or guardians that

expose women and girls to violence, including neglect in providing necessities, leaving children with male neighbors, peer influence, improper dressing, financial deprivation, and sending female children to hawk. Stigmatization and stereotyping were also significant challenges, with girls residing in specific areas being unfairly labeled as "irresponsible" based on their environment. Women felt safer within their home communities due to familiarity, but their safety was compromised when they moved to unfamiliar or slum areas. In addition, the study highlighted the presence of danger zones in various states, such as Kaduna, Niger, where women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence. These zones, where illicit activities often occur, become more perilous during certain times of the day, emphasizing the increased risk for women and children in these areas.

## Trends and Patterns of VAWG

The discussion on VAWG within the community reveals that rape and domestic

violence are the most prevalent forms of violence. The participants noted that these

incidents are not isolated but occur frequently, with an uptick during holiday periods. However, there seems to be a glimmer of hope, as a commensurable number of participants highlighted a reduction in rape cases due to increased awareness and educational campaigns, which encourage girls to report incidents of violence. The influence of media programs like “Mata a Yau” in raising awareness about VAWG is noteworthy. “Mata A Yau” is a television program broadcast on AREWA24, a channel that focuses on Hausa culture and entertainment. The show is available in various locations through different platforms, including YouTube and streaming services. As for its reach, AREWA24 primarily targets audiences in Northern Nigeria, but its content is accessible to viewers in other regions and countries notably Niger, Cameroun, Lake Chad, Ghana on free to air, DSTV, GoTV and StarTimes satellite television services etc. and via online platforms. The channel is known to have a significant presence in the northern states of Nigeria, where Hausa is predominantly spoken.

These programs serve as a critical platform for educating women and girls about their rights and how to protect themselves against violence. However, despite these advances, traditional attitudes, such as the reluctance to prosecute perpetrators due to familial pressures, continue to hinder progress in fully addressing VAWG. Cultural and economic factors are also identified as significant contributors to VAWG. Strict parenting, parental neglect, and the lack of sexual education create vulnerabilities for young girls, leading them to be easily victimized. The current economic situation exacerbates this problem, as materialism and peer pressure push some girls into compromising situations.

The study identified several high-risk locations for violence against women and girls (VAWG), including schools, public spaces, incomplete houses, markets, farms, and motor parks. These

areas are frequented by perpetrators and expose vulnerable children, especially those engaged in hawking, to potential harm. Rape, particularly involving minors, was found to be the most common form of violence, occurring frequently both during the day and more prevalently at night when darkness and uncompleted buildings provide cover for perpetrators. In Kebbi State, multiple rape cases are reported daily, with minors being the most affected. Internally Displaced Persons camps in the Northeast were also identified as vulnerable locations where women and girls are often exploited for food or money. The primary perpetrators of VAWG are identified as young men aged 30-40, and they often include close family members, neighbors, relatives, and strangers.

The study revealed a pattern of violence against women and girls (VAWG) that includes physical violence (slapping, beating), emotional violence (verbal abuse, criticisms), financial abuse (underfunding by husbands, financial exclusion), isolation, and threats. Cultural norms pressure women to remain silent about their abuse, particularly within families, to preserve the family unit. This enforced silence isolates women, limiting their options for seeking help and often leading to desperate measures like running away or resorting to prostitution for survival.

Domestic violence is prevalent, especially among intimate partners and female domestic workers, with physical and psychological abuse being more common in wealthy households, where it is often hidden due to fear of retaliation or job loss. In marriage and intimate relationships, abuse is frequently perpetrated by spouses or partners through threats, violence, and economic control. Financial resources are also used by men outside of marriage to manipulate or exploit women and girls, leading to various forms of abuse, including sexual

exploitation. The study also found that in many northwestern states, women are restricted from leaving their homes without permission from parents, guardians, or husbands, especially in male-dominated societies and among

uneducated women. The study highlighted a critical issue where poverty and social inequities compel vulnerable women and girls to engage in sexual favors to meet their basic needs.

### **Existing Protection and Prevention Services for Survivors of VAWG**

The study reveals a mixed landscape of protection and prevention services for Violence Against Women and Girls across sampled states. Various organizations, including government agencies and NGOs, offer essential services such as Safe Spaces and Legal Aid Services and legal support. While Safe Spaces provide immediate care and skill training, and services ensure access to justice, challenges persist. Many survivors are hesitant to report incidents due to stigmatization and fear, and emergency response mechanisms like dignity kits are available but not always widely utilized. Technology is being leveraged to enhance

reporting and awareness, yet many organizations still use conventional tools. Community-based initiatives involving traditional and religious leaders are crucial but face inconsistencies in engagement. Overall, while there are significant efforts to address VAWG, the effectiveness of these services is limited by low awareness, incomplete legal proceedings, and insufficient focus on addressing the root causes of violence. A more comprehensive approach that tackles cultural and economic factors is needed for long-term effectiveness.

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- Appendix I: Key Informant Interview Guide

# APPENDICES

## Appendix I: Composition of Research Team and Collaboration

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## Appendix II: Cross Section of Photographs during the Fieldwork



WRAPA Coordinator and the Katsina State Research Assistant



Multi-purpose Women Centre Katsina



FGD Session with Women, Jigawa State



KII Session with NGO Representative Kaduna State



FGD Session with Women and Girls, Niger State



FGD Session with Teenage Girls, Kebbi State



KII Session with Female Faith Leader, Zamfara State



FGD Session with women, Gombe State



KII Session with Government Representative, Gombe State



KII Session with CBO Representative, Gombe State

Appendix III: Key Informant Interview Guide  
Appendix IV: Focus Group Discussion Guide

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