

**GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS TO CURB IT: INFERENCE FROM LAGOS STATE**

<sup>1</sup>OLASUPO, Mutiullah. A

<sup>2</sup>ABDULKADIR, Ameen. A

<sup>1&2</sup> Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja

[Mutiullah.olasupo@uniabuja.edu.ng](mailto:Mutiullah.olasupo@uniabuja.edu.ng) & [ameen.abdulkadir@uniabuja.edu.ng](mailto:ameen.abdulkadir@uniabuja.edu.ng)

**ABSTRACT**

Gender-based violence is considered among the most significant violations of human rights principles, cutting across social, economic, and political boundaries. In Nigeria's most populous city (Lagos), Gender Based Violence manifests in multiple forms ranging from domestic abuse and sexual assault to psychological and economical violence, despite existing legal and institutional framework aimed at curbing it. This study examines the widespread nature, causes of gender-based violence within Lagos State, while critically evaluating international interventions designed to address it. The study utilized a descriptive survey approach within a mixed-method framework. Findings from the study shows the need for stronger collaboration between local authorities and international partners, emphasizing community-based strategies and gender-sensitive education as pathways to lasting change. Ultimately, the study extends the existing body of knowledge and engages with contemporary debates surrounding gender-based violence by bridging the gap between global interventions and local realities within the Nigerian context. It recommends continuous call for an integrated, victim-centered approach to policy and implementation.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender, Lagos, Violence, International-intervention.

**Background to the study**

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) over time has come to be acknowledged as one of the gravest infringements on fundamental human rights, confronting societies across the world. It cuts across geographical boundaries, social classes, cultures, and religions, leaving long-lasting physical, psychological, and emotional scars on victims and communities. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is not only a personal tragedy for those affected but also a structural issue that reflect deep inequalities between men and women. It undermines national development, peace, and social cohesion. The United Nations describes Gender-Based Violence as any act or behavior directed at

an individual on the basis of their gender that causes, or has the potential to cause physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm (U.N, n.d).

In Nigeria, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continues to be a persistent and complex problem. Despite numerous laws and institutional frameworks aimed at preventing it, incidents of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, harmful traditional practices, and other forms of abuse remain widespread. The situation in Lagos is particularly alarming. As the nation's economic and social center, the Lagos state is expected to reflect national progress in gender equality and human rights protection. However, reports show that cases of sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and exploitation remain prevalent. Ironically, these occur within proximity to key national institutions responsible for law enforcement and policy implementation (Onwuzoo, 2019).

The Nigerian government, in collaboration with leading international bodies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the African Union, has made notable strides in addressing this issue. At the National Gender Policy and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 were established to protect victims and prosecute offenders. In addition, international conventions like CEDAW and Beijing Declaration have provided frameworks for promoting women's right and equality. However, despite these efforts, implementation remains weak. Limited funding, poor coordination, insufficient political will, and lack of sustained awareness campaigns continue to hinder progress (Aderonke & Yusuf, 2022, Ajayi & Kolo, 2020 and Olumide 2015).

Against the backdrop, the persistence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Lagos State highlights significant concerns about the efficacy of measures implemented by both national and international organizations. Why do cases continue to rise despite the existence of strong legal instruments? What factors hinder the successful implementation of these frameworks? These questions highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the cultural, institutional, and socio-economic dimensions of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Therefore, this study examines the nature, underlying causes, and consequences of Gender Based Violence in the Federal Capital Territory, examines the impact of international interventions, and provides practical recommendations for strengthening preventions and response strategies.

## **Statement of the problem**

Despite considerable national and international attention, Gender-based violence persists to be a significant issue in Nigeria, and particularly Lagos State. The enactment of progressive laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 was expected to lead to a significant reduction in incidents of violence. However, the persistence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) suggests that the gap between legal frameworks and actual practice remains wide. Numerous reports indicate that cases of rape, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of abuse continue to increase, with many going unreported or unresolved (Abimbola, 2017, Adebayo, 2024).

The core issue is not the absence of laws but the poor enforcement of those already in place. Law enforcement agencies often fail to implement these laws effectively, they often lack the training and sensitivity required to handle Gender Based Violence (GBV) cases, while survivors face bureaucratic and emotional barriers when seeking justice. Many victims choose silence over reporting due to fear of stigma, social backlash, or disbelief. Furthermore, there is limited access to legal and psychosocial support services, especially for women in rural or low-income communities. These challenges have allowed impunity to thrive, discouraging victims and emboldening perpetrators.

Cultural and religious factors further compound the issue. Deep-seated patriarchal values often normalize violence against women, portraying it as a private family matter rather than social crime. In some communities, harmful cultural practices such as child marriage, wife inheritance, and female genital mutilation persist under the guise of tradition. Such cultural justifications make it difficult to challenge abusive behaviors or advocate for women's right, particularly when local customs conflict with legal standards (Alabi, et.al 2024, Onwuzoo, 2019, UNICEF, 2019 and World Health Organization, 2021).

Although international organizations and donor agencies have implemented interventions such as awareness campaigns, capacity-building workshops, and survivor support programs, their impact remains limited. Many of these initiatives are short-term, donor-driven, and poorly coordinated with government institutions. As a result, they often fail to achieve lasting behavioral or systemic change. Additionally, poor data management and weak monitoring mechanisms make it difficult to evaluate progress or measure the real impact of these interventions.

The persistence of Gender Based Violence in Lagos State, despite the presence of numerous interventions and institutions, therefore underscores a deeper structural problem. It suggests that legal, cultural, and institutional efforts have not yet converged effectively to create a society that truly upholds gender equality and justice. This study thus seeks to examine the underlying causes of Gender Based Violence in the Federal Capital Territory, evaluate the nature and impact of international interventions, and propose pragmatic strategies that can bridge existing gaps and enhance the capacity and effectiveness of systems designed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What constitutes the primary causes and manifestations of gender-based violence (GBV) in Lagos State, Nigeria?
- ii. How do socio-cultural norms and legal frameworks influence gender-based violence in the Lagos State, Nigeria?
- iii. What roles have international organizations played in tackling gender-based violence in Lagos State, Nigeria?
- iv. How effective are these international interventions in reducing gender-based violence?

### **Objectives of the study**

Primary objective of this research is to examine gender-based violence in Lagos and assess international interventions aimed at addressing it.

Specific objectives:

- i. To investigate the causes and manifestation of gender-based violence prevalent in Lagos State, Nigeria.
- ii. To analyze the socio-cultural and legal frameworks influencing gender-based violence in Lagos.
- iii. To evaluate the role of international organizations in addressing gender-based violence in Lagos.
- iv. To evaluate the effectiveness and impact of international interventions in tackling the menace.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Concept of Gender Based Violence (GBV)**

Gender Based Violence (GBV) constitutes a pervasive global issue, encompassing multiple forms of harmful behaviors aimed at individuals due to their gender. It mirrors and perpetuates structural inequalities, notably contributing to the subordination of women and girls in patriarchal societies. Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been recognized not only as a human rights violation but also as a significant impediment to social, economic and political development (AU, 2015).

Gender-based violence refers to any harmful act directed at an individual because of their biological sex or gender identity. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, as well as threats, coercion, and deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private spheres (UNICEF, 2019). The concept of Gender Based Violence is fundamentally rooted in gender norms and unequal distribution of power that governs relationships and societal structures. It is differentiated from general violence by its basis in gendered expectations, and it often serves to maintain structures of male dominance and control. (Arowolo, 2024). Gender Based Violence includes various forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) it entails any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering.

Several studies have identified high rates of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Lagos, spanning intimate partner or household violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, and harmful traditional practices. According to the (NAPTIP, 2017) over 30% of women in Nigeria aged 15 – 49 have experienced physical violence, within Lagos being a hotspot due to its blend of rural and urban populations and the anonymity afforded by city life. (NHRC, 2024). Socio-cultural norms patriarchal values, and weak law enforcement contribute significantly to underreporting and tolerance of Gender Based Violence. A study by Alokun (2025) indicated that many victims in the Lagos are reluctant to report abuse due to stigma, fear of retaliation, coupled with limited trust in the justice system. Additionally, inadequate shelter and support services leave survivors vulnerable and dependent on abusive relationships.

Gender Based Violence (GBV) refers to any harmful act directed at an individual because of their gender identity. Although it can affect people of all genders, women and girls remain disproportionately vulnerable due to deeply entrenched social and structural inequalities. As observed by Olumide (2015), approximately three-quarters of violent acts against women are committed by men. This significant disparity has led many scholars to concentrate on Gender Based Violence (GBV) as it pertains primarily to women and girls, often framing it within the context of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially in cases involving sexual abuse.

Feminist scholars, such as Richter (1994), describe gender-based violence as all harmful actions perpetrated against women due to their gender, resulting in physical, psychological, or sexual suffering. However, Gender Based Violence (GBV) extends beyond overt acts of violence. It also includes threats of such acts, coercion, and the use of force to compel actions against a person’s will, as well as systemic denial of rights rooted in economic or social ideologies. These violations may occur in both public and private spheres and are frequently perceived as hate crimes targeting women solely on the basis of gender.

In alignment with the perspective, “According to the United Nations Declaration on the elimination of Violence Against women (1993), gender-based violence refers to any action or behavior rooted in gender that causes, or is likely to cause, physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. It also includes threats, coercion, and unjust restrictions on a woman’s freedom, whether these occur in private or public settings”.

**Table 1. Some common forms of Gender Based Violence**

<b>Types</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Physical violence	Beating, slapping, strangling, torture etc.
Sexual violence	Rape, sexual harassment, marital rape, child sexual abuse etc.
Emotional / psychological violence	Threats, intimidation, humiliation etc.
Economic violence	Withholding financial resources, preventing education and work etc.
Harmful traditional practices	Female genital mutilation (FGM), early child marriage, widowhood rites, among others.

## Concept of International Intervention

International interventions refer to the actions and initiatives undertaken by foreign state actors and transnational institutions (including key organization as the United Nations, European Union, or International NGOs), and donor agencies to address specific issues or crises in a country or region beyond their own borders. These interventions are usually aimed at promoting peace, development, human rights, public health, or humanitarian assistance. In the context of Gender Based Violence (GBV), international interventions involve coordinated efforts by international actors to prevent violence, protect survivors, build institutional capacity, and promote legal and

## Challenges and gaps in international interventions

Cultural relativism vs universal rights: tension between respecting cultural practice and upholding gender rights. Donor priorities of funding often favors measurable short-term outcomes over transformative change just as victim centered vs perpetrator focused approaches may differ as most interventions center survivors, but prevention requires addressing perpetrators and societal norms. It is also important to stress lack of male engagement due to the fact that many interventions overlook the critical role of men and boys in challenging patriarchal violence. Underreporting and data gaps are other challenge as a result of lack of reliable Gender Based Violence (GBV) data which consequently undermines effective policy making.

**Table 2: Some examples of international actors and their contributions**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Key intervention</b>
UNFPA (United Nation Population Fund)	Provides sexual and reproductive health services – Trains healthcare workers on Gender Based Violence (GBV) case management - supports safe spaces for women and girls.
UN Women	Advocacy on policy reform – capacity building for law enforcement public awareness campaigns.
USAID	Funds local CSOS – strengthens legal frameworks – provides support for GBV shelters.
EU (European Union)	Implements multi-sectoral response programs – supports data systems on Gender Based Violence (GBV) reporting – promotes education of girls to prevent early marriage.
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Offers psychological support – economic empowerment programs for survivors.
British Council / FCDO	Supports justice reform and access to legal aid for survivors – Gender sensitivity training for security agents.

## **Theoretical Framework**

For this study, the Feminist theory is adopted. The framework offers gender sensitive, rights-oriented, and holistic perspectives for evaluating the research problem.

### **Feminist theory**

At the core of this research lies feminist theory, which views gender-based violence (GBV) as a systematic issue entrenched in patriarchal social and institutional structures that sustain male dominance and female subordination. This theory underscores that acts of violence against women and girls in the FCT extends beyond individual cases and reflect broader social, cultural, and structural dynamics or isolated incidents but reflect deeply embedded cultural, social, and institutional norms. Feminist theory highlights how unequal power relations, cultural norms, entrenched gender roles, and societal expectations play a significant role in perpetuating gender-based violence, often creating barriers that prevent survivors from seeking justice and support.

Feminist theory does not originate from a single founder or perspective, as it emerged from a broad movement involving many thinkers over time. However, several key figures have significantly shaped the development of feminist theory across different waves. Early influencers (proto-feminists); include Mary Wollstonecraft, widely considered among the earliest feminist theorists. She contended in “A vindication of the rights of woman” (1792), arguing strongly that women should have access to education and equal rights in the society.

Feminist theory is based on several core assumptions that guide its analysis of society, power and gender relations. While these may vary slightly depending on the strand of feminism (liberal, radical, Marxist, intersectional, etc.), the core assumption generally is that Gender is a social construct. Feminist theory posits that gender roles and expectations are shaped by socio-cultural, political, and economic influences rather than by inherent biological factors.

Feminist theory has been highly influential, but like all theories, it has its weaknesses and limitations. These criticisms come from both within the feminist movement (internal critiques) and from outside (external critiques). One of the main criticisms is; Lack of unity and over generalization. feminist theory is not a single unified theory but a collection of diverse perspectives (e.g., liberal, radical, Marxist, postmodern, intersectional). This diversity can lead to confusion, contradictions, and lack of clear direction. For example, radical feminism’s focus on patriarchy

may not align with liberal feminism's emphasis on legal reforms. It has also been criticized on the ground that early theories were largely developed in the Global North and often reflect Western, white, middle class women's experiences. Global South feminists argued that Western feminism often imposes values that may not align with local realities.

In spite of the criticism, feminist theory remains relevant to this study, as it provides a critical lens through which to analyze gender-based violence as a product of patriarchal power structures. In the context of the FCT, gender-based violence can be seen not merely as individual acts of violence but as systemic oppression rooted in unequal gender relations and cultural norms that reinforce male dominance. Feminist theory informs best practices in designing international interventions. It promotes empowerment-based models that collaborate with local women's organizations. This ensures sustainability and respect for cultural contexts while promoting gender equity which are applicable in the context of FCT, Nigeria.

### **Research Methodology**

This research utilized a descriptive survey approach within a mixed-method framework. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to respondents in the FCT, while secondary data were obtained from documentary reviews of international reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature on Gender Based Violence (GBV). Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, bar charts, pie charts were used to present findings. This combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies provided a comprehensive understanding of Gender Based Violence in the FCT and the international interventions addressing it.

### **Data Presentation**

Here, I present the data collected from 30 staff members of the Ministry of Women Affairs Lagos State regarding Gender Based Violence (GBV) and International interventions to address it. Data were gathered using random sampling with a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis.

## Demographic information of Respondents

**Table 3: Gender Distribution of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	10	33.3
Female	20	66.7
Total	30	100

The table above shows that the majority of respondents were female (66.7%), which is expected given the gender focus of the ministry.

## Experience of Gender Based Violence (GBV) among Respondents

**Table 4: Gender-disaggregated experiences of gender-based violence**

Gender	Yes	No	Total
Male	3	7	10
Female	12	8	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>

## Forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) Experienced or Observed

**Table 5: Forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) Reported**

Form of GBV	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical violence	6	20.0
Sexual violence	5	16.7
Emotional abuse	4	13.3
Economic abuse	3	10.0
Multiple forms	12	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

## Causes of GBV as Perceived by Respondents

**Table 6: Causes of GBV**

Cause	Frequency	Percentage
Cultural norms & patriarchy	10	33.3
Weak law enforcement	8	26.7
Poverty and economic dependency	6	20.0
Substance Abuse	3	10.0
Other	3	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

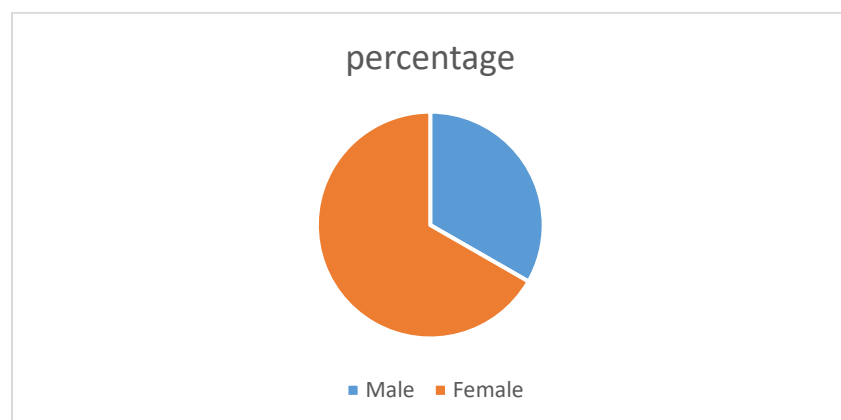
## Awareness of International Interventions

**Table 7: Awareness Levels**

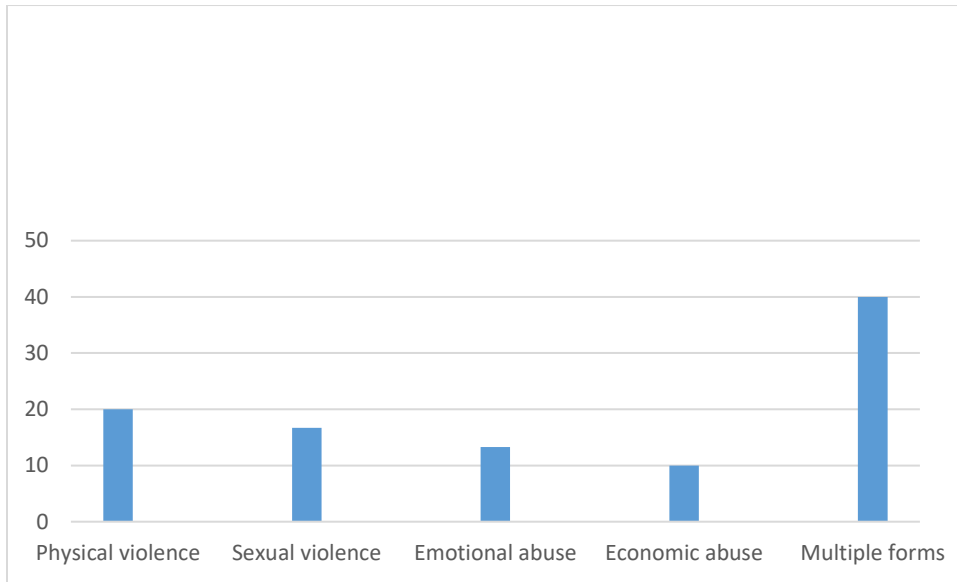
Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aware of UN women campaigns	14	46.7
Aware of UNFPA programs	10	33.3
Aware of multiple agencies	4	13.3
Not aware	2	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

## Charts

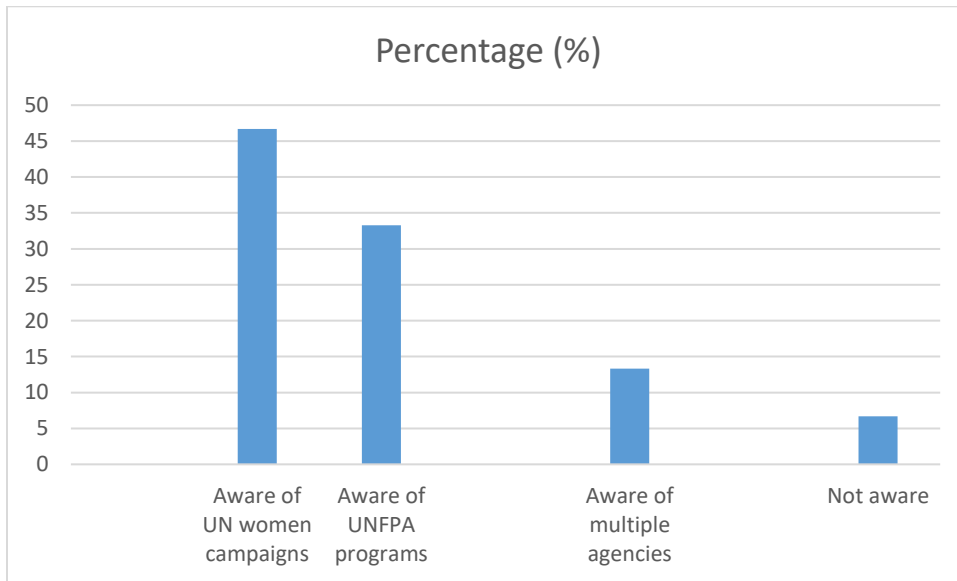
**Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents.**



**Figure 2: Forms of Gender Based Violence reported**



**Figure 3: Awareness of international interventions**



### **Discussion of findings**

This study explored the nature, prevalence, and impacts of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria with particular inference from Lagos State as well as the international efforts and interventions put in place to address it. Using a mixed-method research approach, data were gathered from staff of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to gain insight into their experiences and perspectives on the issue. The findings revealed that most respondents were female (66.7%),

while males made up 33.3%. This shows that women, who are often the primary victims of Gender Based Violence, were adequately represented in the study.

The research identified several forms of Gender Based Violence common Lagos, including physical violence (20%), sexual violence (16.7%), emotional abuse (10%), and overlapping cases of multiple forms of abuse (40%). These findings highlight the complex and multi-dimensional nature of gender-based violence in the region. The study also showed different levels of awareness among respondents regarding international treaties and interventions targeted at addressing Gender Based Violence (GBV). About 40% respondents reported being highly aware of such efforts, 35% had moderate awareness, while 25% indicated low awareness of such interventions.

Although Nigeria has ratified a number of international framework- such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-the findings revealed that their implementation remains largely ineffective. Many respondents attributed this to poor funding, traditional barriers, and inadequate public awareness campaigns. Despite these challenges, the study recognized that institutions like the Ministry of Women Affairs, local NGOs, and international partners have made notable progress in advocacy, policy formulation, and public sensitization. However, there is still a clear need for stronger community engagement, improved victim support systems, and better monitoring to ensure that interventions lead to lasting results.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that Gender Based Violence remains a pervasive issue in Lagos State cutting across physical, sexual, emotional, and economic dimensions. Although various international frameworks provide guidelines for addressing Gender Based Violence, the persistence of the problem highlights gaps in effective implementation within Nigeria. The study confirms that inadequate resources, weak institutional capacity, limited awareness, and socio-cultural factors continue to hinder progress in combating Gender Based Violence.

It is therefore evident that while the Nigerian government and its partners have taken commendable steps through legislation, policy initiatives, and advocacy campaigns, more needs to be done to ensure the translation of these frameworks into practical action. Strengthening awareness, ensuring effective law enforcement, and building a robust support system for survivors are critical for

achieving lasting change. Addressing Gender Based Violence requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that combines governmental commitment, international collaboration, and community participation.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- i. **Intensify efforts to improve the Implementation of International Frameworks**  
The Nigerian government should translate ratified international treaties into enforceable domestic laws with strong monitoring mechanisms.
- ii. **Improve Public Awareness and sensitization**  
Large scale community campaigns should be carried out to address cultural beliefs that normalize Gender Based Violence (GBV). Awareness of international conventions should also be simplified for local understanding.
- iii. **Capacity Building for Law Enforcement and Judiciary**  
Specialized training should be provided for police, legal officers, and judicial personnel to handle Gender Based Violence (GBV) cases sensitively and efficiently.
- iv. **Victim-Centered Support Systems**  
Establish more shelters, counseling centers, and medical support facilities for survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the FCT. International partners can provide both technical and financial support in this regard.
- v. **Collaboration Between Stakeholders**  
Stronger synergy should be fostered between government agencies, civil society organizations, and international development partners to ensure coordinated intervention strategies.

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