

## **Gender-Based Violence and Welfare of Women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite several women-related welfare packages, laws and policies formulated by the United Nations and Nigerian government, gender-based violence (GBV) in Akwa Ibom State remains a pervasive issue, affecting countless females and contributing to a cycle of trauma, poverty, and social marginalisation. The paper examined the relationship between gender-based violence and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Anchored on the group theoretical model of David Braybroke and Charles Lindblom in 1963, and Judith Herman's 1992 Trauma theory, the study utilised a descriptive and survey approach. Data were analysed via simple linear regression at a significance level of 0.05. The analysis demonstrated a substantial correlation between women's assistance programs and gender discrimination, domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assaults, and harmful widowhood practices in Akwa Ibom State. Thus, it was concluded that Gender-Based violence is significantly influenced by the implementation of women's welfare schemes in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that the Akwa Ibom State government, in pursuance of women's welfare, should increase women's inclusion in elective positions and be proactive in creating more funds in budgetary allocations for women's empowerment; enact more appropriate laws and rigorously enforce same to serve as deterrent to perpetrators of gender-based violence against women and the girl child.*

**Keywords:** Gender, violence, welfare, women, discrimination

### **Introduction**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive global issue that contributes to social instability, human insecurity, and developmental challenges. It encompasses various forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse rooted in unequal gender relations and entrenched societal norms (Chime et al., 2022). GBV not only violates fundamental human rights but also limits survivors' ability to engage fully in societal and economic life. Efforts to address GBV are closely linked to the global agenda for gender equality, as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for the empowerment of women and girls through equitable access to resources and opportunities (United Nations, 2015). Closing gender gaps is

increasingly seen as essential to improving health, education, food security, and poverty reduction outcomes (World Bank, 2022). However, many regions still face limitations in measuring and addressing inequality due to inadequate gender-disaggregated data.

The persistence of GBV is reinforced by social stigma and silence, which inhibit survivors from seeking justice and recovery. Although both sexes can perpetrate violence, women are disproportionately affected, often in contexts where gender hierarchies are deeply embedded (UN Women, 2021). As such, inclusive approaches that involve both men and women as partners in change are necessary to dismantle systemic inequalities (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006). Promoting women's welfare through healthcare, legal services, psychosocial support, and shelter is central to recovery from GBV. However, these services often face challenges in sustainability and coordination. A shift toward survivor-centred, community-based models is recommended to enhance long-term impact (UNFPA, 2022). In line with global commitments, Nigeria's National Gender Policy seeks to address these issues and strengthen protections for women, particularly GBV survivors (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006).

### Conceptual Clarification

#### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread and entrenched human rights violation that manifests in various forms: physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, and socio-economic, directed at individuals, based on their gender, gender identity, or perceived gender roles (Russell, 2007; United Nations, 2023). It remains a global public health and social justice concern, affecting individuals across various age groups, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Graham, 2006). GBV disproportionately affects women and girls, though it can also target men and individuals in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and other sexual orientations (LGBTQ+) community (UTC, 2024). The impacts on survivors are far-reaching, including physical harm, trauma, economic marginalisation, and long-term mental health challenges (Herp, 2003). Rooted in structural inequalities and patriarchal norms, GBV not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also obstructs efforts toward gender equity (UN Women, 2021). Effective prevention and response require coordinated, multisectoral approaches involving legal reform, survivor-centred services, and widespread education to challenge discriminatory attitudes (The Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, 2011). Although GBV can occur in both public and private spaces, it is often sustained by cultures of silence and impunity, making comprehensive legal and institutional responses essential for long-term change. Table 1 showcases gender based violence against women.

**Table 1: Reported Cases of Gender-based Violence against the Female Gender**

| YEARS | S/ N | CASES                                                   | REPORT ED | INVESTIGATED |
|-------|------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| 2022  | 1    | Exportation of persons for prostitution                 | 66        | 21           |
|       | 2    | Procurement of persons for sexual exploitation          | 32        | 11           |
|       | 3    | Recruitment of persons under 18 years for prostitution  | 51        | 40           |
|       | 4    | Foreign travel that promotes prostitution               | 87        | 25           |
|       | 5    | Recruitment of persons for pornography or brothel       | 8         | 2            |
|       | 6    | Recruitment of persons under 18 years for prostitution. | 22        | 36           |

|      |   |                                                         |            |            |
|------|---|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
|      |   | <b>TOTAL</b>                                            | <b>246</b> | <b>135</b> |
| 2023 | 1 | Exportation of persons for prostitution                 | 17         | 2          |
|      | 2 | Procurement of persons for sexual exploitation          | 9          | 6          |
|      | 3 | Recruitment of persons under 18 years for prostitution  | 40         | -          |
|      | 4 | Foreign travel that promotes prostitution               | 23         | 10         |
|      | 6 | Recruitment of persons for pornography or brothel       | 2          | 1          |
|      |   | <b>TOTAL</b>                                            | <b>91</b>  | <b>11</b>  |
|      | 1 | Exportation of persons for prostitution                 | 51         | -          |
|      | 2 | Procurement of persons for sexual exploitation          | 11         | 2          |
|      |   |                                                         |            |            |
| 2024 | 3 | Foreign travel that promotes prostitution               | 19         | 27         |
|      |   | Recruitment of persons for pornography or brothel       | 5          | 3          |
|      | 4 | Recruitment of persons under 18 years for prostitution. | 20         | 12         |
|      |   | <b>TOTAL</b>                                            | <b>106</b> | <b>44</b>  |

**Source:** Adapted from Yearly Data Analysis by National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), 2024

### Women Welfare

Women's welfare is a multidimensional issue encompassing economic, social, and political aspects, and it plays a vital role in achieving equitable development. Welfare programmes can provide critical support for women facing poverty, social exclusion, or gender-based violence, though debates persist regarding their long-term impact on economic independence and labour force participation (Das & Sharma, 2000; Chojnick, 2010). Various socio-economic factors, including caregiving responsibilities, single-parenthood, and systemic inequalities, influence women's reliance on welfare schemes. Danjuma (2013) conceptualises women's welfare as a process of empowerment that involves dismantling structures of subordination and granting women access to resources, decision-making power, and social recognition. In this view,

welfare is not merely about assistance but about fostering autonomy and agency. Datta & Kornberg (2002) argue that the welfare and economic empowerment of women are essential to national development, as their marginalisation negatively affects broader outcomes, such as child health and education.

Despite constituting half the population, women often face exclusion from opportunities in political, economic, legal, and educational domains (Udoms et al., 2024; Udoms & Gogo, 2012). Achieving gender equity requires dismantling all forms of oppression and discrimination (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2015). Empowering women is thus fundamental to both individual well-being and collective socio-economic progress (Chompa, 2022). Women's social welfare is also associated with structural social changes, aiming to improve the conditions of the most vulnerable, including victims of gender-based violence (Fritz, 2004; Udoms et al., 2015).

### **Domestic Violence**

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Violence and the Family (2016) defines domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviours, including a wide range of physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment used by one person in an intimate relationship against another to gain power unfairly or maintain that person's misuse of power, control, and authority. It can either result in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, psychological harm, mal-development, or even death. Walker (2019) points out that when one form of family violence appears, we can expect all others, including various aggressive acts outside the family, in the community (Walker 2019). Huss (2009) defines the nature of domestic violence as any action of violence perpetrated within the context of a significant interpersonal relationship. Domestic violence could include violence between a husband and a wife, a girlfriend and boyfriend, or gay or lesbian partners. It could be violence between parents and children, adult children and elderly parents, or we could meet it between siblings. Krug et al. (2002) note that intimate partner abuse can be found in all relationships, both same-sex and heterosexual. But although domestic violence can take place in any intimate relationship, the great majority of it is perpetrated by men against women, and because of its frequency and severity, it becomes a much larger problem in public health terms (Itzin et al., 2010).

Domestic violence includes wife abuse, woman abuse, battered women, and partner abuse. It refers to intentionally using/exercising physical aggression to cause physical harm or death (Coke et al., 2000). Domestic violence includes beating, biting, kicking, slapping or strangling someone. As domestic violence cases increasingly enter the court system, and consequences of aggressive accidents threaten the functioning, well-being and health of victims, in family or outside systems, it is important to describe the extent and nature of this phenomenon (Huss, 2009). Although both men and women initiate violence, the violence enforced by women is less frequent and has less severe consequences compared to male offenders.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts two theories in a bid to understand and analysing the subject matter of GBV vis-à-vis women's welfare. While the Group theory delves into policy making as an intersection and compromise between and among groups in society, the trauma theory explores the psychological and emotional effects of traumatic experiences arising from GBV.

### **Group Theory**

The Group Theoretic Model, introduced by David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom in 1963, presents policy-making as a product of interaction and compromise among competing interest groups. This model sees society as composed of various organised interest groups that

continually struggle to influence public policy in their favour. Government, in this framework, plays the role of mediator, negotiating compromises between these groups to maintain balance. At the heart of this model is the belief that public policy is not shaped in isolation by lawmakers but is the outcome of a dynamic process of bargaining among interest groups. According to this theory, policy is a form of equilibrium, an outcome of competing forces that constantly shift as the relative power of groups changes. Each group attempts to gain influence, but policy only reflects the balance that is temporarily reached among them. Public policy, then, is essentially the result of these ongoing group interactions. Anderson (1997) notes that many public policies emerge from the activity of such groups. Hayes (1992) similarly argues that the allocation of societal resources is determined by the relative strength of competing interest groups. Latham (1965) reinforces this idea by describing public policy as a temporary truce, constantly subject to change as new groups gain influence. The legislature, in this view, merely formalises the victories and compromises of these groups, codifying them into law.

The model emphasises the nature and role of “groups.” A group is defined not just by the number of people involved, but by their shared goals and continued interaction. Scholars like Njoku (2011) and Shafritz et al. (2007) stress that genuine groups involve long-term cooperation, personal interactions, and a sense of belonging. According to Hellriegel (1998), group members typically share communication channels and common objectives, distinguishing true groups from mere collections of individuals. Bentley (1948) adds that a group should be understood as an ongoing process - a dynamic pattern of activity rather than a static collection of individuals. Groups emerge and function when members engage frequently and purposefully. What binds these individuals is a shared “interest,” which is central to the theory. Interest is defined as a shared attitude or claim that a group seeks to promote or protect within the social system. This idea is also reflected in pluralist theory, which sees society as made up of numerous groups formed around shared occupations, ideologies, or social conditions. These groups, especially in rural areas, drive development by organising around specific shared interests. Truman (1964) further defines a group as individuals who, based on shared attitudes, make claims on others in society. These shared attitudes form the group’s interest, making every group an interest group by nature. In essence, the Group Theoretic Model explains politics and policy-making as a continuous contest among organised interests, where public policy reflects the balance of power at any given moment.

### **The Trauma Theory**

Trauma Theory, developed by Judith Herman in 1992, explores the psychological and emotional effects of traumatic experiences. It emphasises that individuals who endure such events often carry complex wounds that impact their mental health, relationships, and physical well-being. When applied to survivors of gender-based violence, Trauma Theory helps illuminate the unique challenges they face, particularly male survivors who may be constrained by societal expectations of masculinity. Male survivors of gender-based violence often encounter stigma and silence due to gender norms that discourage vulnerability. Trauma Theory provides a framework for understanding these experiences, revealing how trauma can manifest in emotional distress, psychological dysregulation, and difficulties in social interactions. It also helps researchers examine how social expectations shape whether and how male survivors disclose their trauma and access support services. Integrating Trauma Theory into the study of male survivors allows for the development of targeted interventions. These may include trauma-informed counseling, tailored support systems, and efforts to challenge harmful gender norms. By doing so, researchers and practitioners can better meet the needs of this often-overlooked population and foster more inclusive and effective support systems (Herman, 1992).

Kardiner (1941) and later scholars have expanded on the theory to understand trauma in social contexts. When applied to gender-based violence, Trauma Theory underscores the importance of addressing structural and cultural factors that influence trauma recovery. It offers a comprehensive framework for examining the interplay between gender, trauma, and access to care. Despite the relevance of Trauma Theory, this study adopts the Group Theory of policy formulation due to its applicability to the Gender-Driven Development (GDD) approach. Women's groups employing GDD focus on collective action in policy planning and implementation, emphasising group interests over individual efforts. As Njoku (2011), Udoms & Atakpa (2021) note, group policy-making involves negotiation, compromise, and the subordination of personal interests to collective goals. Group Theory, therefore, aligns with the dynamics of gender advocacy and public policy, where various interest groups compete and collaborate to influence decisions and allocate resources.

### Methods and Materials

The descriptive and survey design was adopted for the research. The descriptive research design was used to explain (in qualitative forms) the major variables of the subject under study and their relationships. The survey research design was used in the collection of primary data through the questionnaire and analysed using the quantitative approach. The sample size of the study was 400. It was determined using the Taro Yamane (n) Formula. The Taro Yamane Formula (n) is a statistical method used in social sciences and other fields to determine the sample size of a large population of a study. The formula has a 95% confidence level. It is represented and calculated thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size required

N = total population of the study

E = allowed error (0.05%)

By substitution:

$$n = 2,600,000 / 1 + 2,600,000 (0.05)^2$$

$$n = 2,600,000 / 1 + 2,600,000 (0.0025)$$

$$n = 2,600,000 / 1 + 6500$$

$$n = 2,600,000 / 6501$$

$$n = 399.93$$

(By approximation) = 400

The stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select responses, and the questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the aid of an experienced research assistant in the Local Government Areas under study.

### Specification of Model

In this study, specification models were developed. This was done to enable the researcher to test formulated hypotheses with a view to achieving the objectives of the study. The regression model was as follows:

The simple regression model used was:

$$WW = a_1 + b_1GD + e_1 \quad 3.1$$

$$WW = a_2 + b_2DV + e_2 \quad 3.2$$

$$WW = a_3 + b_3HT + e_3 \quad 3.3$$

$$WW = a_4 + b_4SA + e_4 \quad 3.4$$

$$WW = a_5 + b_5HWP + e_5 \quad 3.5$$

In the model, WW represents the Welfare of Women

$a_1 - a_3$  are the constants,  $b_1 - b_3$  are regression coefficients of independent variables, .

$e_1 - e_3$  error terms for equations i-iii.

GD= Gender Discrimination

Dv = Domestic Violence

HT = Human Trafficking

SA = Sexual Assault

HWP = Harmful Widow Practices

Y is the value of the Dependent variable (Welfare of Women), what is being predicted or explained.

The regression analysis was adopted to test the stated hypotheses at 0.01 level of significance. This was with a view to establishing the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable

### Data Analysis

During the course of the research, 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents in the state, of which 236 were correctly filled out and returned. This number represents a 59% response rate. However, out of the number returned, 232 were in usable form (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Questionnaire Administration and Retrieval**

| Senatorial District | Copies of Questionnaire Administered | Number Returned |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Uyo                 | 134                                  | 113             |
| Ikot Ekpene         | 133                                  | 52              |
| Eket                | 133                                  | 71              |
| Total               | 400                                  | 236             |
| Percentage          | 100                                  | 59              |

**Source:** Field Work (2025)

Table 2 shows that 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. This was based on their proportional contribution to the total population of the state. Out of 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 236 copies of the questionnaire were returned. This number represented a 67.04% response rate on the administered questionnaire. Out of the returned copies of the questionnaire, 232 were in usable form and formed the basis of data analysis in the research.

**Table 3 Descriptive Statistics**

|                    | N         | Mean      | Std.<br>Deviation | Skewness  | Std.<br>Error | Kurtosis  | Std.<br>Error |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| Statistic          | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic         | Statistic | Statistic     | Statistic | Statistic     |
| WOMEN WELFARE      | 354       | 4.2662    | .97884            | -1.642    | .130          | 2.680     | .259          |
| GENDER             | 354       | 4.2325    | .67447            | -.939     | .130          | .796      | .259          |
| DISCRIMINATION     |           |           |                   |           |               |           |               |
| DOMESTIC           | 354       | 4.2768    | .72245            | -1.291    | .130          | 1.371     | .259          |
| VIOLENCE           |           |           |                   |           |               |           |               |
| HUMAN              | 354       | 4.1130    | 1.12354           | -1.464    | .130          | 1.392     | .259          |
| TRAFFICKING        |           |           |                   |           |               |           |               |
| SEXUAL ASSAULT     | 354       | 4.1758    | 1.27391           | 1.865     | .130          | 1.266     | .259          |
| HARMFUL            | 354       | 4.0487    | 1.12793           | -1.181    | .130          | .698      | .259          |
| WIDOWHOOD          |           |           |                   |           |               |           |               |
| PRACTICES          |           |           |                   |           |               |           |               |
| Valid N (listwise) | 354       |           |                   |           |               |           |               |

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Table 3 shows that for the independent variables - gender discrimination, domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault and harmful widowhood practices, the mean values obtained for all the responses were 4.2325, 4.2768, 4.1130, 4.1758 and 4.0487, respectively. This shows the average scores of all the responses regarding these variables. These variables were obtained from the standard deviation values of 0.67447, 0.72245, 1.12354, 1.27391 and 1.12793, respectively. This indicates high variability in the scores of the responses regarding these variables.

Furthermore, the distribution for gender discrimination, domestic violence, human trafficking and harmful widowhood practices were shown to be negatively skewed to the left with a skewness value of -0.939, -1.291, -1.464 and 1.181, respectively, while sexual assault skewed to the right with a value of 1.865. The kurtosis values obtained for these variables were 0.796, 1.371, 1.392, 2.266 and 0.698, respectively, indicating that these variables were leptokurtic.

For the dependent variable - women's welfare, the mean value obtained for all the responses was 4.2662. This shows the average score of all the responses regarding this variable. The variability of the distribution was obtained from the standard deviation value of 0.97884. This indicates a high level of variability in the scores of the responses for this variable. Also, women's welfare was shown to be negatively skewed with a skewness value of -1.642 and a kurtosis value was also obtained as 2.680, indicating a leptokurtic distribution.

## Testing of Hypotheses

### Test of Hypothesis One

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between Gender Discrimination and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Table 4: Analysis of Responses to Gender Discrimination**

| <b>Gender Discrimination (GBVGD)</b>                                                                                | <b>Total</b>  | <b>Strongly agree</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly disagree</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Gender discrimination abuse significantly affects survivors' mental health and personal lives in Akwa Ibom state.   | 354<br>(100%) | 228<br>(64.4%)        | 69<br>(19.5%)  | 25<br>(7.1%)   | 25<br>(7.1%)    | 7<br>(2.0%)              |
| Gender discrimination victims experience difficulty in maintaining long-term economic stability in Akwa Ibom State. | 354<br>(100%) | 192<br>(54.2%)        | 80<br>(22.6%)  | 28<br>(7.9%)   | 25<br>(7.1%)    | 29<br>(8.2%)             |
| Gender discrimination leads to poor healthcare-seeking behaviour among survivors in Akwa Ibom state.                | 354<br>(100%) | 159<br>(44.9%)        | 102<br>(28.8%) | 38<br>(10.7%)  | 44<br>(12.4%)   | 11<br>(3.1%)             |
| Gender discrimination can reduce the long-term effects of economic growth of the victim in Akwa Ibom state          | 354<br>(100%) | 182<br>(51.4%)        | 102<br>(28.8%) | 36<br>(10.2%)  | 23<br>(6.5%)    | 11<br>(3.1%)             |
| Valid N (listwise)                                                                                                  | 354           |                       |                |                |                 |                          |

Source: Field survey (2025)

Table 4 shows that 228(64.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that gender discrimination significantly affects survivors' mental health and personal life in Akwa Ibom state, 69 (19.5%) agreed, 25 (7.1%) were neutral, 25 (7.1%) disagreed, while 7 (2.0%) of them strongly disagreed. However, 192 (54.2%) of them strongly agreed that gender discrimination victims experience difficulty in maintaining long-term economic stability in Akwa Ibom state, 80(22.6%) agreed, 28 (7.9%) were neutral, 25(7.1%) disagreed, while 29 (8.2%) strongly disagreed.

Moreover, 159 (44.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that gender discrimination leads to poor healthcare-seeking behaviour among survivors in Akwa Ibom state, 102 (28.8%) agreed, 38 (10.7%) were neutral, 44 (12.4%) disagreed, while 11 (3.1%) strongly disagreed. Furthermore, 182 (51.4%) respondents strongly agreed that gender discrimination can reduce the long-term effects of economic growth of victims in Akwa Ibom state, 102 (28.8%) agreed, 36 (10.2%) were neutral, 23(6.5%) disagreed, while 11(3.1%) respondents strongly disagreed.

**Table 5: Correlation between Gender Discrimination and Women's Welfare**

|                       |                     | WOMEN'S WELFARE | GENDER DISCRIMINATION |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| WOMEN WELFARE         | Pearson Correlation | 1               | .032                  |
|                       | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                 | .440                  |
|                       | N                   | 354             | 354                   |
| GENDER DISCRIMINATION | Pearson Correlation | .032            | 1                     |
|                       | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .440            |                       |
|                       | N                   | 354             | 354                   |

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Based on the decision rule of the study, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative rejected because the p-value of 0.440 shown in Table 4 is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, there is no significant relationship between gender discrimination and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Test of Hypothesis Two:** Domestic violence has no significant effect on the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Table 6: Analysis of Responses to Domestic Violence**

| Domestic Violence (GBDPV)                                                                                       | Total      | Strongly agree | Agree       | Neutral    | Disagree  | Strongly disagree |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Domestic violence negatively affects the healthcare of survivors in Akwa Ibom State in Akwa Ibom state.         | 354 (100%) | 203 (57.3%)    | 88 (24.9%)  | 49 (13.8%) | 11 (3.1%) | 3 (0.8%)          |
| Survivors of domestic violence experience long-term economic challenges due to their trauma in Akwa Ibom state. | 354 (100%) | 227 (64.1%)    | 73 (20.6%)  | 25 (7.1%)  | 13 (3.7%) | 16 (4.5%)         |
| Domestic violence reduces survivors' ability to seek medical care when needed in Akwa Ibom state.               | 354 (100%) | 182 (51.4%)    | 107 (30.2%) | 21 (5.9%)  | 23 (6.5%) | 21 (5.9%)         |
| Economic empowerment programs can help mitigate the effects of domestic violence in Akwa Ibom State.            | 354 (100%) | 211 (59.6%)    | 78 (22.0%)  | 32 (9.0%)  | 9 (2.5%)  | 24 (6.8%)         |
| Valid N (listwise)                                                                                              | 354        |                |             |            |           |                   |

Source: Field survey (2025)

Table 6 shows that 203 (57.3%) respondents strongly agreed that domestic violence negatively affects the healthcare of survivors in Akwa Ibom State, 88 (24.9%) agreed, 49 (13.8%) were neutral, 11 (3.1%) disagreed, and 3 (0.8%) disagreed. Equally, 227 (64.1%) respondents strongly agreed that survivors of domestic violence experience long-term economic challenges due to their trauma, 73 (20.6%) agreed, 25 (7.1%) were neutral, 13 (3.7%) disagreed, while 16 (4.5%) strongly disagreed.

However, 182 (51.4%) respondents strongly agreed that in Akwa Ibom state, domestic violence reduces survivors' ability to seek medical care when needed, 107 (30.2%) agreed, 21 (5.9%) were neutral, 23 (6.5%) disagreed, while 21(5.9%) strongly disagreed. In the same vein, 211 (59.6%) strongly agreed that economic empowerment programs can help mitigate the effects of domestic violence in Akwa Ibom state, 78 (22.0%) strongly agreed, 32 (9.0%) were neutral, 9(2.5%) disagreed, while 24 (6.8%) strongly disagreed.

**Table 7: Correlation between Domestic Violence and Women's Welfare**

|                   |                     | <b>WOMEN'S WELFARE</b> | <b>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| WOMEN WELFARE     | Pearson Correlation | 1                      | -.746**                  |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                        | .000                     |
|                   | N                   | 354                    | 354                      |
| DOMESTIC VIOLENCE | Pearson Correlation | -.746**                | 1                        |
|                   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                   |                          |
|                   | N                   | 354                    | 354                      |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Based on the decision rule of the study, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted because the p-value of 0.000 shown in Table 7 is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, domestic violence has a significant effect on the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### Test of Hypothesis Three

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Human Trafficking and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Table 8: Analysis of Responses to Human Trafficking**

| Human Trafficking (GBVHT)                                                             | Total      | Strongly agree | Agreed      | Neutral    | Disagree  | Strongly disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Survivors of human trafficking have access to counselling services in Akwa Ibom state | 354 (100%) | 175 (49.4%)    | 86 (24.3%)  | 44 (12.4%) | 27 (7.6%) | 22 (6.2%)         |
| Human trafficking results in the loss of life of victims in Akwa Ibom state           | 354 (100%) | 199 (56.2%)    | 69 (19.5%)  | 40 (11.3%) | 24 (6.8%) | 22 (6.2%)         |
| Community-based initiatives can prevent human trafficking in Akwa Ibom State          | 354 (100%) | 200 (56.5%)    | 89 (25.1%)  | 28 (7.9%)  | 15 (4.2%) | 22 (6.2%)         |
| Human trafficking is a result of poverty and unemployment in Akwa Ibom State          | 354 (100%) | 174 (49.2%)    | 107 (30.2%) | 29 (8.2%)  | 15 (4.2%) | 29 (8.2%)         |
| Valid N (listwise)                                                                    | 354        |                |             |            |           |                   |

Source: Field survey (2025)

As revealed in Table 8, 175 (49.4%) respondents strongly agreed that survivors of human trafficking have access to counselling services in Akwa Ibom state, 86 (24.3%) agreed, 44 (12.4%) were neutral, 27 (7.6%) strongly disagreed, while 22 (6.2%) strongly disagreed. However, 199 (56.2%) strongly agreed that human trafficking results in loss of life of victims in Akwa Ibom state, 69 (19.5%) agreed, 40 (11.3%) were neutral, 24 (6.8%) disagreed, while 22 (6.2%) strongly disagreed.

In the same vein, 200 (56.5%) respondents strongly agreed that community-based initiatives can prevent human trafficking in Akwa Ibom state, 89 (25.1%) agreed, 28 (7.9%) were neutral, 15 (4.2%) disagreed, while 22 (6.2%) disagreed. Also, 174 (49.2%) respondents strongly agreed.

**Table 9: Correlation between Human Trafficking and Women's Welfare**

|                              |                     | <b>WOMEN'S<br/>WELFARE</b> | <b>HUMAN<br/>TRAFFICKING</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>WOMEN<br/>WELFARE</b>     | Pearson Correlation | 1                          | -.816**                      |
|                              | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                            | .000                         |
|                              | N                   | 354                        | 354                          |
| <b>HUMAN<br/>TRAFFICKING</b> | Pearson Correlation | -.816**                    | 1                            |
|                              | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                       |                              |
|                              | N                   | 354                        | 354                          |

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Based on the decision rule of the study, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted because the p-value of 0.000 shown in Table 9 is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, there is a significant relationship between human trafficking and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Test of Hypothesis Four**

Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between sexual assault and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Table 10: Analysis of Responses to Sexual Assault**

| <b>Sexual Assault (GBVSA)</b>                                                                                                                                  | <b>Total</b>  | <b>Strongly agree</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Sexual abuse in when one intentionally sexually touches another person without that person's consent                                                           | 354<br>(100%) | 163<br>(46.0%)        | 105<br>(29.7%) | 40<br>(11.3%)  | 13<br>(3.7%)    | 33<br>(9.3%)             |
| Sexual assault takes many forms, including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats                           | 354<br>(100%) | 211<br>(59.6%)        | 81<br>(22.9%)  | 29<br>(8.2%)   | 12<br>(3.4%)    | 21<br>(5.9%)             |
| Women's basic rights include freedom from harmful sex and freedom from all forms of violence, and this can be protected through the SDGs policy implementation | 354<br>(100%) | 178<br>(50.3%)        | 102<br>(28.8%) | 40<br>(11.3%)  | 12<br>(3.4%)    | 22<br>(6.2%)             |
| Sexual assault is not discriminatory to females alone                                                                                                          | 354<br>(100%) | 177<br>(50.0%)        | 108<br>(30.5%) | 37<br>(10.5%)  | 10<br>(2.8%)    | 22<br>(6.2%)             |
| Valid N (listwise)                                                                                                                                             | 354           |                       |                |                |                 |                          |

Source: Field survey (2025)

Regarding sexual assault, Table 10 shows that 163 (46.0%) respondents strongly agreed that women suffer sexual abuse, 105 (29.7%) agreed, 40 (11.3%) were neutral, 13 (3.7%) disagreed, while 33(9.3%) strongly disagreed. Also, 211 (59.6%) of them strongly agreed that sexual assault takes many forms, including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats, 81 (22.9%) agreed, 29 (8.2%) were neutral. 12(3.4%) disagreed while 21(5.9%) of them strongly disagreed.

More so, 178 (50.3%) of them strongly agreed that women's basic rights include freedom from harmless sex, and freedom from all forms of violence, and this can be protected through SDGs policy implementation, 102 (28.8%) agreed, 40 (11.3%) were neutral, 12 (3.4%) disagreed while 22 (6.2%) strongly disagreed. In addition, 177 (50.0%) respondents strongly agreed that sexual assault is not discriminatory against females alone, 108 (30.5%) agreed, 37(10.5%) were neutral, 10 (2.8%) strongly disagreed, while 22 (6.2%) strongly disagreed.

**Table 11: Correlation between Sexual Assault and Women's Welfare**

|                |                     | WOMEN'S WELFARE | SEXUAL ASSAULT |
|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| WOMEN WELFARE  | Pearson Correlation | 1               | -.632**        |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                 | .000           |
|                | N                   | 354             | 354            |
| SEXUAL ASSAULT | Pearson Correlation | -.632**         | 1              |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000            |                |
|                | N                   | 354             | 354            |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Based on the decision rule, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted because the p-value of 0.000 shown in Table 11 is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, there is a significant relationship between sexual assault and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

#### Test of Hypothesis Five

H<sub>05</sub>: Harmful widowhood practices have no significant influence on the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

**Table 12: Analysis of Responses to Harmful Widowhood**

| Harmful Widowhood (GBVHW)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Total         | Strongly agree | Agree         | Neutral       | Disagree     | Strongly disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Widowhood cultural practice is an unfair cultural practice against women, especially when it hinders the rights of women.                                                                                                                                                             | 354<br>(100%) | 186<br>(52.5%) | 91<br>(25.7%) | 34<br>(9.6%)  | 16<br>(4.5%) | 27<br>(7.6%)      |
| The widow is seen as unclean and unholy, and as a result of people's perception of the widow, certain harmful widowhood practices are meted out to her.                                                                                                                               | 354<br>(100%) | 176<br>(49.7%) | 83<br>(23.4%) | 43<br>(12.1%) | 23<br>(6.2%) | 29<br>(8.2%)      |
| Women or daughters should inherit their father's property, and wives inherit their husband's property, for this is in line with the equality and non-discrimination provided in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Widowhood laws and international regional norms. | 354<br>(100%) | 178<br>(50.3%) | 88<br>(24.9%) | 36<br>(10.2%) | 18<br>(5.1%) | 34<br>(9.6%)      |
| Widowhood practices amount to violence against women.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 354<br>(100%) | 190<br>(53.7%) | 84<br>(23.7%) | 31<br>(8.8%)  | 14<br>(4.0%) | 35<br>(9.9%)      |
| Valid N (listwise)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 354           |                |               |               |              |                   |

Source: Field survey (2025)

Table 12 shows that 186 (52.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the widowhood cultural practice is an unfair cultural practice against women, especially when it hinders the rights of women, 91 (25.7%) agreed, 34 (9.6%) were neutral, 16 (4.5%) disagreed, while 27 (7.6%) of them strongly disagreed. Also, 176 (49.7%) of them strongly agreed that the widow is seen as unclean and unholy, and as a result of people's perception of the widow, certain harmful widowhood practices are meted out to her, 83 (23.4%) agreed, 43 (12.1%) were neutral, 23(6.2%) disagreed while 29(8.2%) strongly disagreed.

Furthermore, 178 (50.3%) of them strongly agreed that women or daughters should inherit their father's property and wives inherit their husband's property for this is in line with the equality and non-discrimination provided in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, widowhood laws and international regional norms, 88 (24.9%) agreed, 36 (10.2%) were neutral, 18 (5.1%) disagreed while 34 (9.6%) of them strongly disagreed. In addition, 190 (53.7%) of them strongly agreed that widowhood practices amount to violence against women, 84 (23.7%) agreed, 31 (8.8%) were neutral, 14 (4.0%) disagreed, while 35 (9.9%) of them strongly disagreed.

**Table 13: Correlation between Harmful Widowhood Practices and Women's Welfare**

|                             |                     | WOMEN'S WELFARE | HARMFUL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| WOMEN WELFARE               | Pearson Correlation | 1               | .009                        |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                 | .071                        |
|                             | N                   | 354             | 354                         |
| HARMFUL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES | Pearson Correlation | .009            | 1                           |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .071            |                             |
|                             | N                   | 354             | 354                         |

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher's computation (2025) using SPSS 25.0

Based on the decision rule, the null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative is rejected because the p-value of 0.071 shown in Table 13 is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, harmful widowhood practices have no significant influence on the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and the welfare of women in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The first objective assessed the relationship between gender discrimination and women's welfare, testing the hypothesis that no significant relationship exists. Contrary to this, the findings demonstrated a significant positive correlation, aligning with Jimmy & Olsson's (2023) study on women's empowerment in Akwa Ibom, which underscored how gender disparities limit economic productivity and sustainable development. Similarly, Makario et al. (2023) found that empowerment programs are crucial in mitigating GBV, suggesting that access to such initiatives enhances health and safety outcomes for survivors, a notion reflected in the state government's ongoing welfare programs, including skills acquisition, business grants, and leadership development.

The second objective examined the impact of domestic violence on women's welfare, revealing a significant detrimental effect. This finding is consistent with Bukuluki et al. (2021),

who emphasised the need for social norms change and policy enforcement to reduce physical violence in Uganda. Comparable studies by Priddy et al. (2022) and Falb et al. (2022) further highlighted the necessity of addressing women's welfare and gender inequality to prevent violence, especially in vulnerable populations. Akwa Ibom's legal framework, particularly the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law (2020), provides a robust foundation to prosecute offenders and protect victims, though enforcement challenges remain. Data indicating high GBV prevalence and recent high-profile arrests underscore both the magnitude of the issue and governmental commitment to justice.

Regarding human trafficking, the third objective confirmed a significant relationship with women's welfare. This concurs with Bašić & Buzar (2024) and Decker et al. (2015), who emphasised that inadequate prevention policies exacerbate trafficking. Akwa Ibom's comprehensive Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law (2003) and collaboration with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) demonstrate proactive measures, evidenced by numerous arrests and victim rescues. The ratification and implementation of the Child Rights Act (2003) further strengthened protections, contributing to a marked decline in trafficking rates.

The fourth objective explored the connection between sexual assault and women's welfare, confirming no significant association. This is in contrast with Spangaro et al. (2021), who identified women's welfare as critical in reducing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Liebling et al. (2020) and Duru et al. (2018) similarly advocated for integrated, culturally sensitive support services and government interventions to curb sexual violence. In Akwa Ibom, government efforts include the establishment of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), a 60-bed GBV shelter, and an active Gender-Based Violence Management Committee (AKSGBV). These infrastructures support survivors medically, legally, and psychosocially, reflecting a comprehensive approach to GBV mitigation.

## **Conclusion**

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and violence against women have been recognised as critical social issues since the early 1990s. Rooted fundamentally in gender inequality, GBV remains one of the most pervasive violations of human rights across societies worldwide. GBV encompasses a wide range of abuses, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, as well as restrictions on women's autonomy in both personal and social domains. Most incidents of sexual violence occur within interpersonal relationships and manifest as domestic violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, harassment, human trafficking, and harmful widowhood practices, among others. Recent scholarship highlights the urgency of addressing GBV due to its extensive societal impacts. This research established that the welfare of women significantly influences the prevalence and dynamics of GBV in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the findings revealed a significant positive relationship between gender discrimination and women's welfare, suggesting that increased awareness and implementation of women's welfare policies can effectively reduce gender discrimination. Similarly, domestic violence was found to have a significant negative effect on women's welfare, emphasising the role of welfare interventions in mitigating such violence.

Furthermore, the research confirmed a significant relationship between human trafficking and women's welfare, indicating that welfare policies play a critical role in reducing trafficking incidents. The association between sexual assault and women's welfare was also significant, reinforcing the need for comprehensive welfare programs as part of GBV prevention strategies. Lastly, harmful widowhood practices were shown to be significantly reduced through effective women's welfare measures. In conclusion, women's welfare policies constitute an essential strategy for combating GBV in Akwa Ibom State. The full implementation of these policies is

pivotal for fostering a society free from gender-based violence and promoting the overall well-being and rights of women.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Akwa Ibom State government, in pursuance of women's welfare, should increase women's inclusion in elective and administrative positions to enhance effective participation of women.
2. The State government should enact more appropriate laws and rigorously enforce the same with explicit punishment for perpetrators of domestic violence.
3. The Akwa Ibom State government should collaborate more with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), to ensure that both land and water boundaries of the state are monitored with electronic devices such as CCTV.
4. The government should collaborate with law enforcement agencies, the Ministry of Justice, Women's Affairs and the welfare commission to formulate policies and laws that ensure that perpetrators of sexual assault are effectively prosecuted according to the extant law.
5. The government, through agencies such as the National Orientation Agency and the mass media, should adopt strategies such as awareness creation, campaigns and reorientation of the public on the danger of harmful widowhood practices.

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