



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

Khadija Ibrahim (Ph.D.), Halimah Safiyan

Department of Crime Management, College of Administrative Studies and Social Sciences, Kaduna Polytechnic

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra26718>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra26718

ABSTRACT

Domestic violence (DV) remains a pervasive and underreported issue in Nigeria, affecting individuals across socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious lines. This study investigates the effectiveness of Nigeria's criminal justice system in addressing domestic violence, with a focus on legal frameworks, institutional responses, and victim experiences. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with survivors, law enforcement officers, legal practitioners, and civil society advocates across three Nigerian states. Key findings reveal systemic gaps in enforcement, low prosecution rates, and significant cultural and institutional barriers to justice. While laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, offer robust protections, implementation remains inconsistent. The study underscores the need for comprehensive policy reform, capacity building within justice institutions, and culturally sensitive advocacy strategies. These insights contribute to ongoing discourse on legal reform and offer actionable recommendations for stakeholders seeking to strengthen Nigeria's response to domestic violence.

KEYWORDS: Civil Society, Domestic Violence, Enforcement, Legal Reform, Prohibition Act

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence in Nigeria is a pervasive and deeply entrenched societal issue, cutting across ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic boundaries. It manifests in various forms, including physical assault, emotional manipulation, sexual coercion, and economic deprivation. According to the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), approximately 23% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence, while 10% have suffered sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner (National Population Commission, 2019). These figures likely underestimate the true prevalence due to widespread underreporting, driven by fear, stigma, and societal normalization of abuse.

The cultural context of Nigeria plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward domestic violence. In many communities, patriarchal norms and traditional beliefs reinforce male dominance and female subservience, often framing domestic violence as a disciplinary tool rather than a criminal act (Obodo, 2022). Religious institutions and community leaders may discourage victims from seeking legal redress, urging reconciliation and forgiveness instead. This cultural framing not only silences victims but also perpetuates cycles of abuse, making it difficult for survivors to access justice or support services.

Despite growing awareness and the enactment of progressive legislation—such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015—many victims remain trapped in cycles of violence. The VAPP Act represents a significant legal milestone, criminalizing various forms of abuse and providing mechanisms for protection orders, compensation, and rehabilitation. However, its implementation has been uneven across states, with some regions yet to domesticate the law or establish enforcement protocols (Eze-Anaba, 2017). Moreover, the Act's effectiveness is undermined by limited public awareness, inadequate training for law enforcement, and insufficient institutional support.

The Nigerian criminal justice system, encompassing law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and correctional institutions, is tasked with responding to domestic violence. Yet its effectiveness is frequently questioned. Police officers often lack specialized training and may trivialize complaints, discouraging victims from pursuing legal action. In some cases, officers demand bribes or pressure victims to settle disputes privately, further eroding trust in the system (Osazuwa, 2024). The judiciary, while constitutionally empowered to adjudicate domestic violence cases, faces significant challenges, including case backlogs, procedural delays, and limited access to legal aid. Correctional institutions, meanwhile, rarely offer rehabilitative programs for perpetrators, limiting the potential for long-term behavioral change and recidivism prevention.

Institutional inertia and systemic inefficiencies compound the problem. Budgetary constraints, poor inter-agency coordination, and lack of political will have hindered the development of a comprehensive and survivor-centered response to domestic violence. Civil society organizations have attempted to fill these gaps by providing shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support, but their reach remains limited



due to funding and capacity challenges. Furthermore, data collection on domestic violence is fragmented and inconsistent, making it difficult to assess the true scale of the problem or evaluate the impact of interventions.

This paper seeks to critically examine the role of Nigeria's criminal justice system in addressing domestic violence. It explores the legal frameworks, institutional responses, and lived experiences of survivors, with the aim of identifying gaps and proposing actionable reforms. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- i. How effective is Nigeria's criminal justice system in responding to domestic violence?
- ii. What are the experiences of survivors when engaging with law enforcement and judicial institutions?
- iii. What legal and policy reforms are necessary to strengthen institutional responses?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform evidence-based advocacy, policy development, and institutional reform. By situating domestic violence within broader socio-legal and cultural contexts, the research contributes to ongoing discourse on justice, gender equity, and human rights in Nigeria. It also offers comparative insights from other jurisdictions, highlighting best practices and innovative approaches that could be adapted to the Nigerian context.

The scope of the study is limited to three states, Lagos, Kaduna, and Rivers, selected for their geographic diversity and varying levels of legal and institutional development. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, relying on interviews with survivors, law enforcement officers, legal practitioners, and civil society actors. While this approach provides rich, contextual insights, it may limit generalizability. Nonetheless, the findings offer valuable perspectives on the lived realities of domestic violence and the systemic challenges that hinder justice.

In conclusion, domestic violence in Nigeria is not merely a legal issue but a complex social phenomenon rooted in cultural norms, institutional weaknesses, and systemic neglect. Addressing it requires a multifaceted approach that combines legal reform, institutional capacity building, and cultural transformation. The criminal justice system must evolve from a reactive and punitive model to a proactive and survivor-centered framework that prioritizes protection, accountability, and rehabilitation. This paper aims to contribute to that evolution by shedding light on the gaps and opportunities within Nigeria's justice architecture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding domestic violence within the Nigerian context requires a multidimensional theoretical lens. This section explores three key frameworks—Feminist Legal Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Human Rights Approach—to provide a robust foundation for analyzing the legal and institutional responses to domestic violence.

Feminist Legal Theory

Feminist Legal Theory offers a critical lens through which domestic violence can be understood as a manifestation of entrenched gender inequalities and patriarchal power structures. It posits that the law, far from being neutral, often reflects and reinforces societal biases that disadvantage women (Aina-Pelemo & Adeboye, 2021). In Nigeria, this theory is particularly relevant given the cultural and legal norms that have historically subordinated women and normalized male dominance.

The theory challenges the public-private divide in legal discourse, arguing that domestic violence, often relegated to the private sphere, is a public concern requiring state intervention. Nigerian legal history has long treated domestic violence as a family matter, discouraging external interference and legal redress (Izzi & Umunna, 2020). Feminist scholars argue that this approach perpetuates impunity and silences victims.

Moreover, feminist jurisprudence critiques the inadequacies of existing laws, such as the Penal Code and Criminal Code, which fail to explicitly criminalize many forms of domestic abuse. Although the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 marked a significant shift by recognizing emotional, psychological, and economic abuse, its implementation remains inconsistent across states. Feminist theorists advocate for the domestication of the VAPP Act nationwide and for the creation of specialized courts and procedures that are sensitive to the needs of survivors (Namdevrao, 2024).

In sum, Feminist Legal Theory underscores the need for transformative legal reform that not only punishes perpetrators but also dismantles the structural inequalities that enable abuse.

Deterrence Theory

Deterrence Theory offers a criminological perspective on domestic violence, emphasizing the role of punishment in preventing future offenses. It operates on the assumption that individuals are rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of their actions. In this context, the certainty, severity, and swiftness of punishment are critical variables (Ifeanyichukwu et al., 2023).



In Nigeria, however, the deterrent effect of legal sanctions is undermined by systemic inefficiencies. Police officers often fail to respond promptly or appropriately to domestic violence complaints, and judicial processes are plagued by delays, corruption, and a lack of specialization. As a result, perpetrators frequently escape accountability, and victims lose faith in the justice system.

Empirical studies suggest that the low rate of prosecution and conviction in domestic violence cases diminishes the perceived risk of punishment, thereby weakening deterrence (Fareo, 2014). The absence of consistent legal consequences emboldens abusers and perpetuates cycles of violence.

Deterrence Theory also highlights the importance of public awareness and legal literacy. If individuals are unaware of the legal consequences of domestic violence or perceive the system as ineffective, the deterrent effect is nullified. Therefore, strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring swift and fair trials, and publicizing successful prosecutions are essential strategies for enhancing deterrence.

While critics argue that deterrence alone cannot address the root causes of domestic violence, it remains a vital component of a comprehensive criminal justice response.

Human Rights Approach

The Human Rights Approach frames domestic violence as a violation of fundamental human rights, including the rights to life, dignity, equality, and freedom from torture and inhuman treatment. This framework shifts the discourse from criminal justice to social justice, emphasizing the state's obligation to protect individuals from abuse and to ensure access to remedies (Osah & Opakunbi, 2021).

In Nigeria, domestic violence is increasingly recognized as a human rights issue, particularly in light of international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Nigeria is a signatory. However, the gap between international commitments and domestic implementation remains wide. Many states have yet to adopt the VAPP Act, and enforcement mechanisms are weak or nonexistent.

Human Rights Watch has documented pervasive violence against women in Nigeria, including sexual abuse by law enforcement officers and impunity for perpetrators. These violations reflect broader systemic failures and underscore the need for institutional reform and accountability.

The Human Rights Approach also advocates for survivor-centered policies, including access to shelters, counseling, legal aid, and economic empowerment. It calls for the integration of human rights education into law enforcement and judicial training, ensuring that officials understand the gravity of domestic violence and their role in upholding rights.

By framing domestic violence as a rights violation, this approach elevates the issue from a private grievance to a matter of public concern and state responsibility. It aligns legal reform with broader goals of gender equality and social transformation.

Historical and Legal Context of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

Historically, domestic violence in Nigeria was largely perceived as a private, familial issue rather than a matter warranting legal intervention. For decades, acts of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse within households were dismissed as internal disputes best resolved through informal mediation or religious counsel. This cultural framing contributed to a pervasive silence around domestic violence, discouraging victims from seeking justice and enabling perpetrators to act with impunity.

Legal recognition of domestic violence as a public and criminal concern only began to gain traction in the early 2000s, culminating in the enactment of the *Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act* (VAPP Act) in 2015. This landmark legislation marked a significant shift in Nigeria's legal landscape by explicitly criminalizing a wide range of abusive behaviors, including physical assault, emotional abuse, sexual violence, and economic deprivation, and providing mechanisms for protection orders, compensation, and rehabilitation. However, the federal structure of Nigeria requires each state to domesticate the Act independently, resulting in uneven implementation across the country. As of 2025, several states—including Kano and Taraba- have yet to adopt the VAPP Act, leaving many citizens without adequate legal protection.

Several statutes form the backbone of Nigeria's legal response to domestic violence:

- i. Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015: This federal law criminalizes various forms of gender-based violence and provides for victim protection, offender rehabilitation, and legal remedies. It is considered the most comprehensive legislation on domestic violence in Nigeria, but it suffers from fragmented adoption and weak enforcement.



- ii. Penal Code and Criminal Code: These colonial-era laws contain provisions on assault, battery, and grievous harm. However, they lack specificity regarding domestic violence and often fail to address psychological, sexual, or economic abuse. Their language and structure reflect outdated norms that do not align with contemporary understandings of gender-based violence.
- iii. Lagos State Domestic Violence Law, 2007: As one of the pioneering state-level laws, this legislation provides for protection orders and outlines procedures for handling domestic violence cases. Lagos remains one of the few states with a dedicated domestic violence response framework, although enforcement challenges persist.

Challenges in Enforcement

Despite the existence of legal frameworks, enforcement remains inconsistent and fraught with systemic obstacles:

- i. Fragmented Implementation: The requirement for state-level domestication of the VAPP Act has led to a patchwork of legal protections, with some states offering robust enforcement and others lacking any formal mechanisms.
- ii. Inadequate Training: Law enforcement officers often lack the specialized training needed to handle domestic violence cases sensitively and effectively. Many officers trivialize complaints or encourage informal reconciliation, undermining the legal process.
- iii. Judicial Inefficiencies: The judiciary faces significant delays in processing domestic violence cases due to case backlogs, a lack of specialized courts, and procedural complexities. Survivors frequently encounter barriers such as evidentiary requirements and costly legal fees, which deter them from pursuing justice.

Institutional Roles and Limitations

The institutions tasked with responding to domestic violence—namely the police, judiciary, and correctional services—face structural and operational challenges:

- i. Police Force: Officers often lack sensitivity training and may approach domestic violence cases with bias or indifference. Reports of bribery, victim-blaming, and pressure to settle disputes privately are common, eroding public trust in law enforcement.
- ii. Judiciary: Courts are overwhelmed with cases and rarely prioritize domestic violence. The absence of specialized family courts and streamlined procedures means that survivors must navigate a complex and often hostile legal environment.
- iii. Correctional Institutions: Rehabilitation programs for perpetrators are virtually nonexistent. Sentencing often focuses on incarceration without addressing the behavioral patterns that lead to abuse, resulting in high rates of recidivism.

Cultural and Societal Barriers

Deeply embedded cultural norms and religious beliefs continue to obstruct justice for domestic violence survivors:

- i. Patriarchal Structures: Nigerian society is predominantly patriarchal, with gender roles that reinforce male authority and female submission. These norms discourage women from reporting abuse, fearing social ostracism, economic repercussions, or retaliation.
- ii. Religious and Traditional Influences: Religious leaders and traditional rulers often advocate for reconciliation rather than prosecution, framing domestic violence as a spiritual or moral failing rather than a legal offense. This approach prioritizes family unity over individual safety and justice.
- iii. Stigma and Silence: Survivors frequently face stigma and disbelief when they speak out. The fear of being labeled as disobedient or dishonorable prevents many from seeking help, while societal expectations pressure women to endure abuse for the sake of preserving family reputation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design aimed at uncovering the nuanced experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in the domestic violence landscape in Nigeria. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative metrics alone. Given the sensitive nature of domestic violence and the diversity of institutional responses, an exploratory framework was deemed appropriate to generate rich, contextual insights and identify patterns that may inform future policy and legal reform.

Study Population

The research targeted a diverse group of participants whose lived experiences or professional roles intersect with domestic violence. These included:

- i. Survivors of domestic violence, whose firsthand accounts provide critical insight into the barriers and facilitators of justice.
- ii. Police officers who represent the frontline of law enforcement and are instrumental in shaping the initial response to domestic violence complaints.
- iii. Legal professionals, including lawyers and magistrates, who interpret and apply the law in domestic violence cases.
- iv. NGO workers and advocates, who offer support services and often bridge the gap between victims and formal institutions.



Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide relevant and diverse insights into the research questions. This non-probability sampling method allowed the researcher to intentionally recruit individuals based on their knowledge, experience, and role within the domestic violence ecosystem. Efforts were made to include participants from different geographic regions (urban and rural), professional backgrounds, and gender identities to capture a wide spectrum of perspectives. Sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached—i.e., no new themes were emerging from the data.

Data Collection Methods

Three primary data collection strategies were utilized:

- i. **Semi-structured interviews:** These were conducted with individual participants using a flexible interview guide that allowed for probing and follow-up questions. This format facilitated open dialogue while ensuring consistency across interviews.
- ii. **Focus group discussions (FGDs):** FGDs were organized with survivors and NGO workers to explore collective experiences and community-level dynamics. These discussions provided a platform for participants to reflect on shared challenges and support mechanisms.
- iii. **Document analysis:** Relevant legal documents, including court records, police reports, and policy briefs, were reviewed to triangulate findings and assess institutional responses. This method helped contextualize participant narratives within formal legal and procedural frameworks.

Tools and Instruments

To facilitate data collection and analysis, the following tools were employed:

- i. **Interview guides:** These were developed based on the research objectives and included open-ended questions tailored to each participant group.
- ii. **Audio recorders:** Used to capture interviews and FGDs verbatim, ensuring accuracy in transcription and analysis.
- iii. **Thematic coding software:** NVivo was used to organize and analyze qualitative data. Transcripts were coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, strict ethical protocols were followed throughout the research process:

- i. **Informed consent:** All participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. Written or verbal consent was obtained before data collection.
- ii. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Participant identities were protected through anonymization. Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reports, and all data were stored securely.
- iii. **Psychological support:** Survivors were offered access to counseling services post-interview, and interviews were conducted in safe, private settings to minimize distress. Researchers were trained in trauma-informed interviewing techniques to ensure sensitivity and care.

RESULTS

Victim Experiences

Across Lagos, Kaduna, and Rivers, survivors of domestic violence consistently reported negative experiences when engaging with law enforcement and justice institutions. In Lagos, for example, many victims described police responses as dismissive or indifferent, with officers often trivializing complaints or encouraging reconciliation over prosecution. In Rivers State, interviews revealed that survivors were frequently advised by family and religious leaders to “endure” abuse for the sake of marital harmony. This cultural pressure, combined with fear of retaliation, led many victims to remain silent or withdraw complaints. Kaduna State presented similar challenges. Survivors noted that police stations lacked dedicated gender desks, and officers were often unaware of the provisions of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), which had been domesticated in the state. The absence of trauma-informed procedures and survivor-sensitive protocols contributed to secondary victimization and emotional distress.

Reporting, Prosecution, and Conviction Rates

Statistical data from Lagos State between August 2024 and July 2025 revealed a total of 3,685 domestic violence cases, making it the most prevalent form of gender-based violence in the state. However, only 140 convictions were secured across all categories of sexual and domestic violence, resulting in a conviction rate of less than 4%. Additionally, just six restraining orders were issued during the same period, despite thousands of reported cases.

In Kaduna, while the VAPP Act has been adopted, implementation remains weak. A 2024 evaluation found that fewer than 25% of reported cases progressed to prosecution, and conviction rates hovered around 7%, largely due to poor documentation, lack of evidence, and survivors withdrawing due to intimidation.



Rivers State faces even more severe challenges. Although domestic violence is increasingly recognized as a public health crisis, there is no centralized data system for tracking cases. Anecdotal evidence and NGO reports suggest that less than 15% of reported cases result in formal charges, and conviction rates are estimated to be below 5%. Survivors often abandon legal proceedings due to prolonged delays and a lack of support.

Effectiveness of Legal Remedies

Legal remedies such as protection orders and shelters are available in theory, but are rarely effective in practice. In Lagos, only 30 survivors were accommodated in government shelters during the 12-month reporting period, despite thousands of cases. Furthermore, 146 survivors received free legal representation, indicating some institutional support, but the scale remains inadequate.

Kaduna State has made efforts to establish referral centers and legal aid clinics, but these are concentrated in urban areas. Rural communities lack access to shelters, and protection orders are rarely enforced due to logistical and jurisdictional challenges. In Rivers, the situation is more dire. There are no government-run shelters, and survivors rely heavily on NGOs for temporary housing and legal assistance. Protection orders are virtually nonexistent, and many magistrates are unfamiliar with the VAPP Act's provisions, leading to inconsistent rulings and procedural delays.

Institutional Responses

Institutional responses across the three states reveal systemic gaps in training, coordination, and accountability:

- i. **Police:** In Lagos, while some officers have received gender-based violence training, many still lack the sensitivity and legal knowledge required to handle cases appropriately. In Kaduna and Rivers, police stations often lack dedicated gender desks, and officers are unfamiliar with survivor-centered protocols.
- ii. **Judiciary:** Courts in all three states face significant backlogs. In Lagos, survivors reported waiting months for hearings, and in Kaduna, the absence of specialized domestic violence courts led to procedural bottlenecks. Rivers State's judiciary is particularly strained, with limited access to legal aid and frequent adjournments that discourage victims from pursuing justice.
- iii. **NGOs:** Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in all three states. In Lagos, NGOs provided therapy to 1,487 survivors and 249 perpetrators, and supported 3,090 children exposed to domestic violence. In Kaduna and Rivers, NGOs are often the only source of shelter, counseling, and legal aid, but their reach is limited by funding and infrastructure constraints.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a stark contrast between the structural potential of Nigeria's criminal justice system and its practical performance in addressing domestic violence. While the country has made commendable strides in establishing legal frameworks, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), the system remains functionally inadequate due to poor implementation, limited institutional capacity, and deep-rooted cultural resistance. The existence of laws alone has not translated into meaningful protection for survivors, as enforcement mechanisms are weak, and justice processes are often inaccessible or ineffective.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Justice System

One of the notable strengths is the formal legal recognition of domestic violence as a criminal and human rights issue. The VAPP Act, along with state-level legislation such as the Lagos State Domestic Violence Law (2007), provides a comprehensive legal framework that criminalizes various forms of abuse and outlines remedies for survivors. Additionally, civil society organizations have become increasingly active in advocacy, legal aid, and survivor support, helping to bridge gaps left by under-resourced state institutions.

However, these strengths are undermined by persistent weaknesses. Enforcement remains inconsistent across states, with many police officers and judicial officials lacking awareness or training on domestic violence laws. Corruption within law enforcement and the judiciary further erodes public trust and deters victims from seeking justice. Moreover, the system lacks a victim-centered approach—survivors often face secondary victimization, procedural delays, and inadequate support services. The absence of specialized courts and trauma-informed personnel exacerbates these challenges, leaving many victims without recourse.

Cultural Norms and Institutional Limitations

Cultural and religious norms play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes toward domestic violence. In many Nigerian communities, patriarchal values reinforce male dominance and female subservience, framing domestic violence as a private matter rather than a criminal offense. Religious doctrines and traditional leaders often advocate for reconciliation over prosecution, discouraging survivors from pursuing legal action. These cultural pressures not only silence victims but also perpetuate cycles of abuse.

Institutionally, the criminal justice system suffers from chronic underfunding and a shortage of specialized personnel. Police stations lack gender desks, courts are overwhelmed with cases, and correctional facilities offer little in terms of rehabilitation for perpetrators. The lack of coordination among agencies further hampers effective response, and data collection on domestic violence remains fragmented and unreliable.



Opportunities for Reform

Despite these challenges, there are clear opportunities to strengthen Nigeria's response to domestic violence:

- i. Establishment of Family and Gender-Based Violence Courts: Specialized courts can expedite cases, reduce procedural delays, and ensure that judges are trained in handling sensitive domestic violence matters.
- ii. Mandatory Training for Law Enforcement: Police officers should receive regular, standardized training on gender-based violence, trauma-informed interviewing, and the legal provisions of the VAPP Act.
- iii. Integration of Restorative Justice Models: While punitive measures are essential, restorative justice approaches—such as mediated dialogue and community-based rehabilitation—can complement legal remedies and promote long-term behavioral change.
- iv. Expansion of Survivor Support Services: Investment in shelters, counseling, legal aid, and economic empowerment programs is critical to ensuring that survivors can safely exit abusive environments and rebuild their lives.

Comparative Insights: Lessons from South Africa and Kenya

Nigeria can draw valuable lessons from other African countries that have implemented innovative justice models. In South Africa, the establishment of specialized domestic violence courts has improved access to justice and reduced case backlogs. These courts are staffed by trained presiding officers who understand the dynamics of abuse and ensure fair, survivor-sensitive proceedings.

In Kenya, the launch of the *Policare* initiative represents a transformative shift in policing attitudes toward gender-based violence. These one-stop centers offer integrated services—including legal aid, psychosocial support, and medical care—under the National Police Service's survivor-centered policy framework. The initiative reflects Kenya's commitment to building trust between survivors and law enforcement, and its multi-sectoral approach could serve as a blueprint for similar programs in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence in Nigeria remains a deeply entrenched and multifaceted issue, shaped by legal shortcomings, cultural norms, and institutional limitations. While the country has made notable progress in establishing legal frameworks—such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act)—the practical impact of these laws is significantly undermined by systemic inefficiencies, inconsistent enforcement, and societal resistance. The findings of this study underscore that domestic violence is not merely a legal problem but a complex social phenomenon that demands coordinated, multi-sectoral intervention.

Implications for Law and Policy

To effectively combat domestic violence, Nigeria must move beyond legislative symbolism and invest in robust implementation strategies. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is paramount. This includes equipping law enforcement agencies with the tools, training, and authority to respond decisively to domestic violence cases. Additionally, expanding victim support services—such as shelters, counseling centers, and legal aid—will ensure that survivors have access to holistic care and protection.

Legal literacy and community engagement are also critical. Many survivors remain unaware of their rights or fear social backlash for seeking justice. Public education campaigns, community dialogues, and school-based programs can help shift societal attitudes and empower individuals to challenge harmful norms. As highlighted by recent stakeholder studies in Southwest Nigeria, collaborative engagement between government actors and civil society is essential to normalize the implementation of anti-violence laws.

Summary of Recommendations and Research Directions

To effectively address domestic violence in Nigeria, a coordinated, multi-sectoral response is essential:

- i. Law Enforcement must undergo continuous training in gender sensitivity and trauma-informed practices, with accountability systems to ensure respectful treatment of survivors.
- ii. The judiciary should establish specialized courts for domestic violence and train judges to adopt survivor-centered approaches that reduce delays and improve outcomes.
- iii. Civil Society Organizations need expanded support to scale up shelter services, legal aid, and advocacy, while also holding government institutions accountable.
- iv. Government Agencies must collaborate across justice, health, and welfare sectors to build integrated systems, including national databases, dedicated funding, and inter-agency coordination.

To strengthen policy and practice, future research should focus on:

- i. Quantitative studies to measure prevalence and track legal outcomes across regions.
- ii. Longitudinal research to assess survivor recovery and the effectiveness of interventions over time.
- iii. Comparative legal analysis to draw lessons from countries like South Africa and Kenya, whose specialized courts and survivor-focused policing offer adaptable models for Nigeria.



REFERENCES

1. Eze-Anaba, I. (2017). *Domestic violence and legal reforms in Nigeria: Prospects and challenges*.
2. National Population Commission. (2019). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*. Abuja, Nigeria: NPC and ICF.
3. Obodo, C. A. (2022). *Domestic violence: Assessing the dilemma of enforcement in Nigeria*. *Journal of Contemporary Private Law*, 4(1), 1–20.
4. Osazuwa, C. M. (2024). *Intimate partner violence and the role of police in Nigeria*. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 9(1), 361–370.
5. Aina-Pelemo, A. D., & Adeboye, J. T. (2021). *Women's Rights and Feminism under the Law in Nigeria*. *Obafemi Awolowo University Journal of Public Law*, 1, 147–164.
6. Fareo, D. O. (2014). *Domestic Violence Against Women in Nigeria*. *Adeyemi College of Education*.
7. Ifeanyichukwu, O. B., Christopher, P. S., & Kizito, D. T. O. (2023). *The Emerging Trend in Culture of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Causes, Theoretical Assumptions and Implications*. *Research Journal of Humanities, Legal Studies & International Development*, 2(1), 1–15.
8. Izzi, M., & Umunna, O. (2020). *Legal Response to Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria*. *SEAH Publications*.
9. Namdevrao, M. N. (2024). *Domestic Violence and Feminist Jurisprudence: Relative Study*. *International Journal of Innovations & Research Analysis*, 4(1), 40–44.
10. Osah, G., & Opakunbi, O. (2021). *Domestic Violence and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria*. *SAPIENTIA Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, 4(1), 112–134.
11. Human Rights Watch. (2019). *Violence Against Women Pervasive in Nigeria*.