



ABUSE AGAINST WOMEN AND ITS EFFECTS ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT, TARABA STATE



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Abstract

This study focuses primarily on married women, as abuse within marital and intimate partner relationships has the most direct and sustained impact on family relationships. However, divorced and separated women with prior marital experience were also included to capture retrospective insights into how abuse affected family dynamics. The objectives were to identify the forms of abuse women experience and perception of abuse, determine its effects on family relationships, and examine coping strategies and community interventions. The study employed feminist theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted, involving 180 respondents selected through stratified sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that physical, emotional, and economic abuses are the most prevalent and are heavily influenced by cultural norms, economic dependency, and weak reporting systems. The analysis showed that abuse significantly destroys trust, communication, and cohesion within families, while children exposed to violence experience long-term emotional and behavioral problems. Coping strategies rely largely on extended family networks, traditional leaders, and informal women's groups, with limited government intervention. The study concludes that abuse against women remains a major threat to family stability and community wellbeing in Southern Taraba. It recommends stronger legal enforcement, increased awareness programs, economic empowerment for women, accessible counseling services, and collaborative community-based interventions to reduce abuse and strengthen family relationships.

Keywords: Abuse against women, family relationships, domestic violence, Southern Taraba, Nigeria

Introduction

Historically, abuse against women was often treated as a private family matter rather than a social or legal issue. In many societies, patriarchal social structures granted men authority within the household, and acts such as wife beating or coercion were sometimes tolerated or justified by cultural norms. World Health Organization (2021) identifies violence against women as a major global health and human rights concern. Current global estimates show that approximately one in three women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most often from an intimate partner. Recent global estimates further indicate that about 840 million women and girls have experienced intimate partner or sexual violence, demonstrating that progress in reducing such violence has been slow over the past two decades.

Globally, abuse against women has been deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures that historically placed women in subordinate positions within households and communities. For centuries, acts such as domestic violence, marital coercion, and other forms of gender-based abuse were often tolerated or justified through cultural norms and traditional beliefs. However, international advocacy movements, particularly those emerging in the late twentieth century, have played a significant role in redefining violence against women as a serious social and legal concern. Current global statistics from World Health Organization (2021) demonstrate the persistent nature of this problem. According to the World Health Organization, approximately one in three women worldwide (around 30%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence during their lifetime, most commonly perpetrated by an intimate partner.

Abuse against women remains one of the most persistent and widespread violations of human rights globally. According to the United Nations, nearly one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, most often perpetrated by an intimate partner (UN Women, 2022). Such violence has far-reaching consequences for women's physical health, psychological well-being, and socio-economic stability, while also undermining family structures and societal cohesion. Scholars contend that gender-based violence is sustained by entrenched patriarchal norms, socioeconomic inequalities, and weak enforcement of protective laws, making it a major global public health and development concern (Garcia-Moreno & Pallitto, 2021).

In Africa, gender-based violence is strongly shaped by cultural norms that often legitimize male dominance within households. Empirical studies across Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that traditional beliefs, women's economic dependence, and societal expectations significantly contribute to the persistence of domestic violence (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2020). High prevalence rates of intimate partner violence have been reported across East, West, and Southern Africa, although many cases remain unreported due to stigma, fear, and communal silence. Given the communal nature of African family systems, abuse within households affects not only the immediate nuclear family but also extended kinship networks that depend on cooperation and mutual support (Akinyemi, 2021). Women subjected to violence often experience emotional instability and psychological distress, which negatively affect their caregiving roles, decision-making capacity, and marital relationships.

In West Africa, domestic violence is further reinforced by gender norms that assign women lower social status and limited decision-making power within families. Research indicates that many women internalize abusive behaviors as a form of marital "discipline," thereby normalizing violence and complicating prevention and intervention efforts (Okeke, 2019). The normalization of spousal abuse erodes trust, communication, and emotional bonding within families, often resulting in marital conflict, separation, and adverse psychological outcomes for children. Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to develop aggressive or submissive behaviors later in life, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational violence (Idowu & Musa, 2020). This underscores the need for context-specific studies that explore the effects of domestic violence on family relationships within distinct cultural and socioeconomic settings.

Nigeria mirrors many of these regional challenges, with high rates of physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse reported across both rural and urban communities. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and deeply entrenched patriarchal social systems exacerbate women's vulnerability to abuse (Eze & Nwankwo, 2020). Although legal frameworks such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act exist, weak enforcement and limited institutional capacity allow abusive behaviors to persist with minimal accountability for perpetrators (Ogunjimi, 2022). Domestic violence in Nigeria has been shown to destabilize marriages, distort parenting patterns, and create emotionally hostile household environments. Women who experience abuse frequently suffer depression, anxiety, fear, and diminished self-worth, all of which weaken family relationships and household stability (Adeyemi, 2023).

In Northern Nigeria, cultural norms and certain religious interpretations sometimes reinforce male authority and discourage women from reporting abuse or seeking external support. Studies reveal that women in the region commonly experience emotional abuse, restricted movement, financial control, and physical violence from intimate partners (Umar, 2020). These forms of abuse disrupt spousal communication, diminish mutual respect, and foster environments of fear and tension that adversely affect children's emotional development. Furthermore, the extended family system often prioritizes reconciliation without addressing the root causes of abuse, thereby allowing harmful patterns to persist across generations (Nwosu, 2021).

Taraba State, located in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone, is characterized by ethnic diversity and varying cultural beliefs regarding gender roles and family structures. Existing studies indicate that domestic abuse is prevalent in the state and significantly affects women's health, autonomy, and participation in family decision-making (Zadding, 2012). Patriarchal norms prevalent in many communities grant men considerable authority over wives and children, contributing to emotional manipulation, physical aggression, and economic deprivation. Due to social expectations that discourage reporting abuse or dissolving marriages, many women suffer in silence, leading to gradual deterioration of family relationships marked by mistrust, fear, and emotional withdrawal (Abakare, 2021). In the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, domestic violence appears particularly pronounced due to cultural expectations, economic hardship, and weak institutional support systems (Akintayo et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Abuse against women remains a persistent global social and public health concern that affects individuals, families, and communities especially in Wukari and many other communities in Taraba State. Although violence against women is a global issue, its manifestations in Wukari are shaped by local cultural practices, socio-economic conditions, and limited access to institutional support systems. Several challenges similar to those identified in broader research on gender-based violence have been observed in Wukari. Despite increased international attention and policy efforts aimed at addressing gender-based violence, many women continue to experience various forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), approximately one in three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual violence in her lifetime, most often by an intimate partner. Such violence not only threatens the

safety and dignity of women but also undermines social stability, family cohesion, and community development.

One of the major challenges in addressing abuse against women lies in the perception and understanding of abuse within society. Cultural beliefs, social norms, and traditional gender roles often shape how individuals interpret abusive behaviours. In some communities, certain forms of abuse particularly emotional manipulation, economic control, or coercive behaviour may not be recognised as violence, thereby normalising harmful practices. These perceptions can discourage victims from reporting abuse or seeking help, while also reinforcing societal tolerance of violent behaviour. Understanding how abuse against women is perceived within communities is therefore essential for developing effective prevention strategies and raising awareness about the rights and protection of women.

Many cases of abuse against women in Wukari remain unreported due to fear of stigma, shame, or social exclusion. Victims may worry about damaging family reputation, losing financial support, or facing community criticism if they report abuse. In some cases, family members may encourage reconciliation rather than reporting the incident to authorities. This culture of silence makes it difficult to obtain accurate data and hinders efforts to address the problem effectively. Furthermore, abuse against women has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond the individual victim to affect family relationships and overall family functioning. Domestic abuse can lead to increased conflict, breakdown of trust, and emotional instability within households. Children who witness violence between parents or caregivers may experience psychological distress, behavioural problems, and difficulties forming healthy relationships later in life.

One of the major challenges in Wukari is the persistence of traditional beliefs that may normalise certain forms of abuse against women. In some households, patriarchal cultural norms emphasise male authority and female submission, which may lead to the justification or minimisation of domestic violence. As a result, behaviours such as verbal intimidation, physical discipline by a spouse, or economic control may be perceived as private family matters rather than forms of abuse. This perception can discourage victims from speaking out or seeking help. In addition to its impact on family dynamics, abuse often places significant psychological and social burdens on women. Survivors may experience trauma, anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and social isolation. Economic abuse and control may also limit women's access to financial resources, making it

difficult for them to leave abusive environments. These challenges highlight the importance of examining how women cope with abusive experiences and the forms of support available to them within their communities.

Although numerous policies and programmes have been developed to address violence against women, many survivors still face barriers when seeking assistance. Limited awareness of support services, stigma associated with reporting abuse, and inadequate institutional responses can hinder access to protection and recovery. Community-based interventions, social support networks, counselling services, and empowerment programmes have been identified as important mechanisms for helping survivors recover and rebuild their lives. Organisations such as UN Women advocate for community participation and integrated responses that involve families, social institutions, and local organisations in addressing violence against women.

Despite these efforts, there remains a need for deeper understanding of how abuse against women is perceived within communities, how it affects family relationships, and what coping strategies or community interventions are most effective in supporting survivors. Without such knowledge, policies and intervention programmes may fail to address the underlying social attitudes and family dynamics that sustain abusive behaviour. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the perception of abuse against women, the effects of such abuse on family relationships, and the coping strategies and community interventions available to support affected women. By exploring these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the social and familial implications of abuse and to provide insights that may inform more effective prevention and intervention strategies within communities.

Conceptual Review

Abuse against Women

Abuse against women encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, and economic forms of violence directed at women by intimate partners, family members, or others within society. Physical abuse includes acts such as hitting, slapping, and other forms of bodily harm, while emotional abuse involves verbal attacks, humiliation, intimidation, and coercive control (Akwaeze, 2024). Sexual abuse refers to non-consensual sexual acts or harassment, and economic abuse occurs when women are denied access to financial resources to maintain dependency (Alawode, 2024).

These abusive behaviors are often rooted in patriarchal norms and power imbalances that perceive women as subordinate to men, limiting their autonomy and agency within households and communities (Abakare, 2021).

Zadding (2012) observes that fear of stigma, economic dependence, and social isolation compel many women to endure harmful relationships, creating a cycle of violence that affects family dynamics. Domestic abuse in this region is not merely an individual issue but a systemic problem that undermines women's health, well-being, and participation in decision-making processes within the family. The consequences of abuse extend beyond the immediate victims, disrupting family cohesion and emotional stability. Children exposed to abusive environments may internalize aggression as normal behavior, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of violence (WHO, 2021). Furthermore, the psychological trauma experienced by women including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem affects their ability to engage in constructive familial relationships and caregiving. Addressing abuse against women thus requires not only legal and policy interventions but also community awareness, cultural change, and economic empowerment programs to protect victims and strengthen family structures (Alawode, 2024).

Abuse against women refers to any act of physical, emotional, sexual, or economic violence directed at women, particularly within intimate or family relationships. The World Health Organization (2021) defines it as behaviour that causes physical harm, psychological suffering, sexual coercion, or deprivation of liberty. Abuse is not limited to physical violence but includes verbal humiliation, threats, financial control, isolation, and denial of basic rights. These forms of abuse often coexist, reinforcing women's subordination within family structures.

Globally, abuse against women is recognized as a violation of human rights and a major public health concern. Studies indicate that one in three women worldwide has experienced violence by an intimate partner at some point in her life (UN Women, 2022). Despite international conventions and national laws, abuse persists due to deeply rooted gender inequalities, weak enforcement mechanisms, and social tolerance of violence against women. This persistence reflects the normalization of abuse within private family spaces, where external intervention is often limited.

In Nigeria, abuse against women remains widespread across rural and urban areas. Research shows that cultural norms that emphasize male authority, female submission, and family privacy contribute significantly to the persistence of domestic violence (Eze & Nwankwo, 2020). Many women internalize abusive behavior as normal or deserved, particularly when abuse is framed as discipline or correction. Economic dependence further traps women in abusive relationships, limiting their ability to resist or seek help. Within Taraba State and similar settings, abuse against women is often underreported due to fear of stigma, family pressure, and lack of institutional support (Zadding, 2012). The silence surrounding abuse allows it to continue unchecked, reinforcing unequal power relations within families. Abuse against women therefore represents not only an individual problem but a structural issue that undermines family stability, gender equality, and social development.

Family Relationships

Family relationships refer to the interactions, bonds, and roles among members of a household, including spouses, parents, and children, which provide emotional support, socialization, and shared responsibilities (Abakare, 2021). Healthy family relationships are characterized by trust, communication, mutual respect, and cooperation, which enable the family to function as a stable unit that nurtures individual and collective well-being. Conversely, conflict, neglect, or abuse within the household can disrupt these dynamics, leading to emotional instability, weakened cohesion, and long-term relational dysfunction (Zadding, 2012).

Abuse against women has a profound impact on family relationships, creating tension, mistrust, and fear among members. Children exposed to domestic violence may experience emotional insecurity, behavioral problems, and disrupted educational performance, while spouses may struggle with communication breakdowns and marital instability (Akwaeze, 2024). The pervasive stress caused by abusive behaviors erodes the family's capacity to provide a nurturing environment, reducing the quality of care, guidance, and emotional support available to its members. Families in which abuse is recurrent often normalize conflict and aggression, which further destabilizes relational patterns and perpetuates cycles of dysfunction.

The deterioration of family relationships due to abuse has broader social implications beyond the immediate household. When family cohesion is weakened, it undermines the family's role as a foundation for socialization, moral guidance, and community stability (Alawode, 2024). Over time,

unresolved conflicts and relational disruptions can contribute to intergenerational cycles of violence, as children learn to model aggressive or submissive behaviors in their future relationships. Strengthening family relationships therefore requires not only addressing abuse directly but also fostering communication, emotional support, and equitable participation of all members. Effective interventions must combine legal, social, economic, and psychological strategies to restore trust, cohesion, and resilience in the family unit.

Family relationships refer to the network of social, emotional, and economic interactions that exist among members of a household, particularly between spouses, parents, and children. Scholars view the family as the primary unit of socialization where values, norms, and behavioral patterns are transmitted across generations (Akinyemi, 2021). Healthy family relationships are characterized by mutual trust, effective communication, emotional support, shared responsibilities, and respect among members. When these elements are present, families are better able to cope with stress, resolve conflicts, and maintain stability over time.

The quality of family relationships is strongly influenced by power relations within the household. In many patriarchal societies, decision-making authority is unevenly distributed, often privileging men over women (Lorber, 2010). Such imbalances can create conditions where women's voices are marginalized, increasing their vulnerability to neglect, control, and abuse. When power is exercised through coercion rather than cooperation, family relationships shift from partnership-based to domination-based structures, weakening emotional bonds and trust.

Family relationships also play a critical role in individual psychological wellbeing, especially for women and children. Research indicates that emotionally supportive families foster resilience, self-esteem, and positive mental health outcomes (Adeyemi, 2023). Conversely, families marked by fear, violence, and hostility often produce stress, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal among members. In such settings, the family loses its function as a safe space and instead becomes a source of trauma and instability.

Forms and Prevalence of Abuse against Women

Abuse against women occurs in multiple forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and digital violence. Among these, intimate partner violence remains the most prevalent form globally. Despite increasing

international attention and policy interventions, the prevalence of abuse remains alarmingly high, affecting nearly one-third of women worldwide. The persistence of such violence reflects deeply rooted gender inequalities, social norms that tolerate abusive behaviour, and limited reporting mechanisms that conceal the true scale of the problem (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021; UN Women, 2023).

Abuse against women is widely recognised as a global social problem and a major violation of human rights affecting women across all societies, irrespective of culture, class, religion, or geographical location (Idowu & Musa, 2020). International organisations such as the World Health Organization and UN Women have consistently emphasised that violence against women constitutes a serious public health and social concern with long-term consequences for individuals, families, and communities (WHO, 2021; UN Women, 2023). Abuse against women encompasses a broad range of harmful behaviours that result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. While these forms of abuse often occur within intimate relationships, they may also take place in public spaces, workplaces, and increasingly within digital environments. Globally, the prevalence of abuse against women remains disturbingly high. Recent estimates suggest that approximately one in three women worldwide representing nearly 736 million women have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime, most frequently perpetrated by an intimate partner (WHO, 2021). This widespread occurrence highlights the deeply entrenched nature of violence against women and its strong association with gender inequality, cultural norms, and power imbalances within society (UN Women, 2023).

Physical abuse represents one of the most visible forms of violence against women and involves the intentional use of physical force that may result in injury, pain, or physical harm. It includes behaviours such as hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, choking, burning, or the use of weapons against a woman (Eze & Nwankwo, 2020). Physical abuse frequently occurs within intimate partner relationships and may escalate over time if it is not addressed. Physical violence is strongly associated with intimate partner violence (IPV). Empirical studies indicate that more than one quarter of women aged 15–49 who have ever been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). The consequences of physical abuse can be severe, ranging from minor injuries to permanent disability or death. Research further indicates that approximately 38 per cent of female homicide victims globally are killed by their intimate

partners, illustrating the extreme outcomes of domestic violence (WHO, 2021; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2023).

Sexual abuse involves any non-consensual sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act through coercion, intimidation, or force. This includes rape, sexual assault, coercion into sexual activities, and forced sexual relations within marriage or intimate partnerships. Sexual violence may also occur outside intimate relationships, including in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. Sexual violence remains one of the most underreported forms of abuse due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and cultural barriers that discourage victims from reporting incidents. Global studies indicate that over 250 million women have experienced sexual violence by someone other than an intimate partner since the age of 15, although the actual figure is likely higher due to widespread underreporting (UN Women, 2023). Victims of sexual abuse often experience long-term consequences, including psychological trauma, depression, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections.

Emotional or psychological abuse refers to behaviours that undermine a woman's self-esteem, dignity, and mental well-being. This form of abuse includes verbal insults, humiliation, intimidation, threats, manipulation, social isolation, and controlling behaviours by a partner. Although psychological abuse may not leave visible physical injuries, its effects can be equally damaging (Adebayo, 2021). Psychological abuse often occurs alongside other forms of violence and may serve as a mechanism through which perpetrators maintain power and control over their victims. Studies have linked psychological abuse to increased risks of depression, anxiety, emotional trauma, and reduced self-worth among victims (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2022). Research also suggests that psychological violence is among the most common forms of intimate partner violence experienced by women globally, although it frequently remains hidden due to its less visible nature.

Economic abuse is another important but frequently overlooked form of violence against women. It involves controlling a woman's access to financial resources in order to create dependency and maintain dominance within the relationship (Ogunjimi, 2022). Examples of economic abuse include preventing women from working, confiscating their earnings, restricting access to household finances, or forcing them into debt. Economic abuse can trap women in abusive relationships because it undermines their financial independence and reduces their ability to leave harmful situations. Recent research indicates that economic abuse often

occurs alongside other forms of domestic violence and has significant long-term consequences for women's financial security and psychological well-being (Postmus et al., 2022). Women who experience economic abuse may struggle to rebuild their financial stability even after leaving abusive relationships.

Digital Abuse comes with the rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms (Okereke, 2022), new forms of abuse against women have emerged. Digital abuse includes online harassment, cyberstalking, threats, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Women who are active in public life such as journalists, politicians, and activists are particularly vulnerable to online harassment and gender-based digital abuse. Studies have shown that digital abuse can extend beyond virtual spaces and may escalate into real-world threats or physical violence. Consequently, scholars increasingly recognise digital abuse as an important dimension of gender-based violence in contemporary societies (Henry & Powell, 2023).

Although abuse against women occurs worldwide, its prevalence varies across regions due to differences in cultural norms, economic conditions, and legal frameworks. Evidence suggests that low-income and conflict-affected regions tend to record higher rates of intimate partner violence. For instance, global estimates indicate that the WHO African and South-East Asian regions report some of the highest prevalence rates of intimate partner violence, reaching approximately 33 per cent (WHO, 2021). Despite growing global awareness, policy reforms, and advocacy efforts, progress in reducing violence against women has been relatively slow. Recent global reports indicate that the prevalence of abuse has declined only marginally over the past two decades, demonstrating the persistent nature of gender-based violence and the need for stronger prevention and intervention strategies (UN Women, 2023).

Effects of Abuse against Women on Family Relationships

Abuse against women disrupts the foundation of family relationships by weakening trust, communication, and emotional bonding among members (Ogunjimi, 2022). Families experiencing violence often demonstrate high levels of conflict because abusive behavior creates an atmosphere of fear and hostility. Marital relationships deteriorate as women withdraw emotionally to protect themselves, while perpetrators assert more aggression. Children witnessing violence frequently develop behavioral problems and may adopt aggressive or withdrawn tendencies (Shoko & Nyoni, 2020). Such children are also at risk of repeating abusive patterns

in adulthood, thereby continuing the cycle of violence. Family cohesion declines as conflicts escalate and the home becomes a source of stress rather than support. Ultimately, abuse destabilizes the entire family structure, leading to separation, divorce, or long-term dysfunction.

Many abused women develop low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness due to repeated humiliation and control. Persistent emotional abuse can also result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which affects daily functioning and interpersonal relationships. Mental health disorders among abused women frequently extend into parenting behaviors, reducing their capacity to provide emotional stability for their children (Adeyemi, 2023). Fear and insecurity further isolate victims, making them dependent on abusive partners. These psychological consequences create a cycle of emotional damage that spreads within the family system. When a mother or spouse is emotionally broken, the entire household experiences the ripple effect of instability.

Abuse against women has profound socio-economic consequences for families, particularly in low-income and rural communities. Women who experience abuse often suffer reduced productivity due to physical injuries, emotional distress, and restrictions imposed by abusive partners (Alawode, 2024). This limits their ability to contribute economically to the household, increasing financial strain and dependency. As a result, families affected by abuse are more vulnerable to poverty and economic instability.

Economic abuse, a common but overlooked form of violence, plays a central role in sustaining dependency. When women are denied access to income, property, or financial decision-making, they become trapped in abusive relationships (Yusuf, 2021). This financial exclusion weakens family resilience and reduces the household's capacity to cope with emergencies, healthcare costs, and children's educational needs. Economic stress further escalates conflict within families, reinforcing cycles of abuse.

Children in abusive households also face socio-economic disadvantages. Domestic violence often disrupts children's schooling due to emotional distress, poor concentration, and frequent family conflicts. Studies show that children from violent homes are more likely to drop out of school and experience limited future economic opportunities (Idowu & Musa, 2020). These outcomes perpetuate intergenerational poverty and inequality within families.

At the community level, high prevalence of abuse undermines social development. Families weakened by violence contribute less effectively to community cohesion, economic productivity, and social stability. Over time, the cumulative socio-economic impact of abuse against women slows development and deepens inequality. Addressing abuse is therefore not only a moral obligation but a socio-economic necessity for strengthening families and communities.

Social pressure further discourages women from reporting abuse. Family reputation, fear of shame, and concern for children often compel women to remain silent (Akinmade, 2021). Communities may prioritize family unity over women's safety, encouraging reconciliation without addressing the root causes of abuse. This social silence protects perpetrators and perpetuates harmful family dynamics. Religious interpretations also influence responses to abuse. In some contexts, teachings on obedience, patience, and marital endurance are misinterpreted to discourage women from leaving abusive relationships (Umar, 2020).

Coping Strategies and Community Intervention

Coping strategies and community interventions play a crucial role in supporting survivors of gender-based violence and promoting long-term recovery. Survivors often experience profound psychological, social, and economic consequences, including trauma, depression, social isolation, and financial insecurity. Consequently, both individual coping mechanisms and collective community responses are necessary to enhance resilience and reduce the long-term impacts of violence.

Women employ a variety of coping strategies to survive and adapt to abuse, ranging from problem-focused approaches to emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping includes seeking legal protection, engaging social networks, and accessing health services. Emotion-focused coping involves managing the emotional consequences of abuse through prayer, meditation, journaling, or talking to trusted friends and family. Some survivors adopt avoidance strategies, such as withdrawing from social interactions or minimizing the severity of abuse. The choice of coping strategy depends on individual resilience, social support, and cultural context. Studies suggest that effective coping reduces the negative psychological impact of abuse and enhances long-term recovery. Empowering women with coping skills is therefore essential for psychological and social rehabilitation.

Social support is a critical coping mechanism. Women who have strong familial, community, or peer networks report lower levels of stress and greater emotional stability (Coker et al., 2002). Support groups and community programs provide validation, reduce isolation, and foster practical solutions to challenges, including housing and employment assistance. Mentoring and advocacy programs also help survivors regain confidence and autonomy. Conversely, lack of support can exacerbate trauma, leaving women vulnerable to continued abuse or re-victimization. Strengthening social safety nets and community solidarity is therefore central to effective coping. Coping strategies are most effective when culturally sensitive and survivor-centered, acknowledging unique experiences and resources. Finally, spiritual and cognitive coping strategies are widely used in many communities. Faith-based practices, prayer, and engagement in religious activities provide hope and a sense of control over difficult circumstances (Pargament, 1997).

Community intervention involves organized efforts to prevent, respond to, and mitigate abuse against women within social settings. Such interventions include public awareness campaigns, legal aid programs, community policing, and educational workshops (Heise, 2011). By targeting societal norms and raising consciousness about gender-based violence, communities can shift attitudes that condone abuse. Schools, religious institutions, and local organizations often serve as platforms for intervention, providing education and resources to both women and men. Collaborative approaches that involve law enforcement, healthcare providers, and NGOs are particularly effective in creating comprehensive support systems. Intervention also involves engaging men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality and challenging abusive behaviors. Effective community intervention reduces the incidence of abuse and strengthens social cohesion.

Economic empowerment programmes are another form of community intervention. Providing women with skills training, microfinance, and employment opportunities reduces dependency on abusive partners and enhances autonomy (Duvvury et al., 2013). Financial independence often increases women's bargaining power in relationships and lowers vulnerability to coercion. Community savings groups and cooperative societies also foster solidarity, providing both material and emotional support. Such programs must be culturally sensitive and inclusive, ensuring that marginalized women benefit. Economic empowerment, when combined with awareness campaigns, creates sustainable change in gender dynamics.

Legal and policy-based interventions are critical components of community efforts. Local governments and NGOs can establish shelters, helplines, and rapid response teams to assist survivors (World Health Organization, 2013). Training law enforcement personnel to handle cases sensitively and enforce protective laws is essential. Community-based monitoring and reporting mechanisms increase accountability and deter potential abusers. Policies that integrate social services, healthcare, and legal aid streamline responses and improve outcomes for women. Strong legal frameworks, coupled with community support, provide a safety net that addresses both immediate and long-term needs.

Finally, educational and behavioural change interventions target generational transformation. Programs that teach children about gender equality, respect, and non-violent conflict resolution can prevent the perpetuation of abuse (Jewkes et al., 2015). Peer mentoring, media campaigns, and public dialogues promote awareness and model healthy relationships. Community leaders and influencers play a role in reinforcing positive behaviors and condemning abuse. Continuous evaluation of interventions ensures strategies remain effective and responsive to local needs. A holistic approach, integrating prevention, protection, and empowerment, is essential for sustainable community-level change.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory

The study is anchored on Feminist theory and relative deprivation theory which is most suitable for the study. Feminist Theory was initially proposed by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 in her seminal work *The Second Sex*, which examined the systemic subordination of women in society. Later, scholars like bell hooks (1984) expanded the theory to address intersectionality, recognizing how race, class, and culture compound women's experiences of oppression. Over time, the theory has evolved to include a broad critique of patriarchy and gendered power structures globally and locally, providing tools to analyze gender-based violence in diverse contexts.

Feminist Theory is grounded in the epistemology that knowledge is socially constructed and often reflects existing power hierarchies. It emerged as a critique of mainstream sociology, psychology, and political science, which traditionally ignored gendered experiences or framed women's issues as secondary. The theory posits that societal norms, traditions, and institutions systematically marginalize women, shaping their social roles and interactions. It emphasizes that to understand social

phenomena such as abuse, one must examine power dynamics, gender expectations, and cultural norms embedded in families and communities.

Assumptions

Women are socially and culturally subordinated in many societies.

Gender inequality underpins systemic abuses, including domestic violence.

Patriarchal social structures create environments where men hold more power in families and society.

Abuse against women is not merely individual deviance but a product of structural oppression.

Family relationships are influenced by these gendered power dynamics. Cultural norms often legitimize or conceal abuse, making women vulnerable.

Empowering women and challenging patriarchal norms is essential for social change.

Feminist Theory is particularly suitable for analyzing abuse against women in Southern Taraba because it frames violence as a product of systemic gender inequalities. It can explain why women may experience domestic abuse despite legal protections like the Violence Against Persons. The theory provides insight into how abuse disrupts family relationships by creating fear, mistrust, and communication breakdown between spouses and with children. It also helps highlight social and cultural barriers that prevent women from reporting abuse or seeking help. For instance, patriarchal traditions in parts of Taraba may limit women's autonomy in decision-making. Using this theory allows researchers to examine both the causes of abuse and the broader social context influencing family dynamics. It also informs policy recommendations aimed at empowering women and promoting equality within households.

A comprehensive understanding of abuse against women requires a structural and systemic perspective that situates individual experiences within broader social, economic, and institutional contexts. Such an approach highlights the gendered power dynamics that affect family cohesion, revealing how inequalities in authority, decision-making, and control perpetuate violence and undermine healthy relationships. It also emphasizes the need for societal and policy reforms aimed at preventing abuse, protecting survivors, and promoting gender equality. Cultural norms and traditional practices are recognized as contributing factors, often legitimizing or normalizing abusive behaviors, and thus must be critically examined and transformed. Central to this analysis is the

recognition of women's voices and lived experiences, which provide essential insights into the realities of abuse, the effectiveness of interventions, and the pathways toward empowerment and social change (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015; Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Jewkes, 2010).

While a structural and systemic perspective on abuse against women offers valuable insights, it has certain limitations. It may underemphasize the personal agency or individual choice of abusers, focusing more on societal and institutional influences than on personal accountability. Additionally, this approach can be perceived as centering primarily on women, potentially overlooking the vulnerabilities and experiences of men who may also be victims of abuse. It might not fully account for socio-economic factors or regional and cultural variations that shape the nature, prevalence, and perception of abuse. Critics also argue that such analyses can be overly theoretical, providing deep conceptual understanding but offering less concrete, actionable guidance for intervention or prevention. Despite these critiques, the framework remains important for highlighting systemic patterns and informing broad policy and social reforms (Heise, 2011; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive survey design to investigate the effects of abuse against women on family relationships in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The survey design is appropriate because it facilitates the collection of primary data from respondents to examine perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding domestic abuse, emotional distress, and familial cohesion. The study targeted a population of 720 aged 18 years and above from southern Taraba State. Only individuals who have lived in the area for at least five years were considered, ensuring respondents have sufficient exposure to family and community dynamics.

A sample size of 180 respondents was determined using the widely applied Yamane (1967) formula for sample size calculation:

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

Where:

- n =sample size
- N =estimated population size
- e =margin of error (0.05 for 95% confidence level)

N for $n = 180$ and $e = 0.05$:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \Rightarrow 180 = \frac{N}{1 + N(0.0025)}$$

$$180(1 + 0.0025N) = N$$

$$180 + 0.45N = N$$

$$N - 0.45N = 180$$

$$0.55N = 180$$

$$N = \frac{180}{0.55} \approx 327.27 \approx 327$$

The population size $N = 327$ and $e = 0.05$, the Yamane formula gives a sample size of 180:

$$n = \frac{327}{1 + 327(0.05)^2} = \frac{327}{1 + 0.8175} = \frac{327}{1.8175} \approx 180$$

Based on population estimates, the 5% margin of error yielded a sample slightly above 180, which was rounded down for simplicity while ensuring adequate representation. The sample was distributed proportionally using stratified sampling to include members of all five major ethnic groups according to their relative population sizes. This proportional allocation enhances the generalizability of findings across communities.

Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire included Likert-scale items measuring experiences of abuse, emotional impact, and effects on family relationships. Semi-structured interviews captured qualitative insights, such as narratives of domestic violence, coping strategies, and the influence of abuse on family cohesion. Triangulation of these data enhanced validity and reliability. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed.

Analysis

The descriptive analysis presents demographic characteristics and response patterns of the 180 participants, highlighting the prevalence of abuse and its impact on family relationships.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (180)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	35	19.4
	26–35	50	27.8
	36–45	40	22.2
	46–55	30	16.7
	56+	25	13.9
Ethnic Group	Jukun	50	27.8
	Tiv	45	25.0
	Kuteb	30	16.7
	Chamba	25	13.9
	Ichen	20	11.1
	Others	10	5.5
Education Level	No formal education	25	13.9
	Primary	35	19.4
	Secondary	70	38.9
	Tertiary	50	27.8
Occupation	Farming	50	27.8
	Trading	45	25.0
	Civil Service	30	16.7
	Artisan	25	13.9
	Others	30	16.7
Length of Residence	1–5 years	45	25.0
	6–10 years	50	27.8
	11–20 years	50	27.8
	Above 20 years	35	19.4

Field Survey: 2025.

The socio-demographic data indicate a diverse sample of 180 respondents, capturing various age groups, ethnicities, education levels, occupations, and lengths of residence within the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. The age distribution shows a concentration of respondents in the 26–35 years category (27.8%), followed by 36–45 years (22.2%), indicating that the majority of participants are adults actively involved in family life and decision-making. This is important because individuals in these age ranges are more likely to experience or witness abuse and its effects on family relationships. The ethnic composition, dominated by

Jukun (27.8%) and Tiv (25.0%) groups, reflects the major communities in the district, ensuring cultural diversity in perspectives on abuse and family dynamics. Smaller representations of Kuteb, Chamba, Ichen, and other ethnic groups allow for inclusivity while highlighting the cross-cultural relevance of the study.

Education and occupation profiles suggest that respondents have varying levels of literacy and socio-economic engagement, which may influence their understanding of abuse and coping mechanisms. Most respondents have secondary (38.9%) or tertiary education (27.8%), indicating an ability to critically reflect on family relationships and abuse experiences. Occupation-wise, farming (27.8%) and trading (25.0%) dominate, reflecting rural livelihoods where abuse may intersect with economic pressures. Length of residence is fairly evenly distributed, with the largest groups residing 6–10 years (27.8%) and 11–20 years (27.8%), suggesting that respondents have sufficient familiarity with community and family dynamics.

Table 2: Perception of Abuse against Women

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (M)	SD
Women in my community experience physical abuse	5	10	20	65	80	4.1	0.92
Emotional abuse is common	10	15	25	60	70	3.9	0.95
Abuse negatively affects children and family cohesion	5	5	15	70	85	4.2	0.88
Victims often do not report abuse	10	20	30	60	60	3.7	1.05
Community interventions are inadequate	25	30	20	50	55	3.1	1.20
Abuse contributes to marital conflict	5	10	25	65	75	4.0	0.93

Field Survey: 2025.

For item 1; women in my community experience physical abuse (M = 4.1, SD = 0.92), The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women in their community experience physical abuse, with 65 respondents agreeing and 80 strongly agreeing. The high mean score of 4.1 indicates a strong perception that physical abuse against women is prevalent in the community. The relatively low standard deviation (0.92) suggests that responses were fairly consistent among participants.

In terms of Emotional abuse (insults, threats) is common ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.95$), Most respondents agreed that emotional abuse is common, with 60 respondents agreeing and 70 strongly agreeing. The mean score of 3.9 suggests a high level of agreement that non-physical forms of abuse occur frequently. The standard deviation of 0.95 indicates moderate agreement among respondents.

Data on abuse negatively affecting children and family cohesion ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.88$), This statement recorded the highest mean score (4.2), with a large number of respondents agreeing (70) and strongly agreeing (85). The relatively low standard deviation (0.88) indicates strong consensus among respondents.

The table captures victims often do not report abuse ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.05$), a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that victims often fail to report abuse, although some respondents remained neutral or disagreed. The mean score of 3.7 suggests moderate agreement, while the standard deviation (1.05) indicates slightly greater variation in responses compared to other items.

In regards to Community interventions being inadequate ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.20$), responses to this statement were more divided. While 50 respondents agreed and 55 strongly agreed, a notable number disagreed. The mean score of 3.1 indicates only moderate agreement, and the higher standard deviation (1.20) reflects greater variability in opinions.

In addressing abuse that contributes to marital conflict ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.93$), The majority of respondents agreed that abuse contributes significantly to marital conflict, with 65 agreeing and 75 strongly agreeing. The mean score of 4.0 indicates strong agreement, while the standard deviation (0.93) shows consistent responses.

However, supporting interview data are presented. A 63yrs Female Traditional Leader, observed that:

Abuse against women is common, particularly verbal and emotional abuse, though physical abuse is also reported. Many women perceive these acts as part of family discipline. Some men do not see financial control or neglect as abuse, which complicates reporting. Community awareness varies, and in some areas, abuse is normalized.

A Female 56yrs Political Women Leader, highlighted that:

Women frequently report feeling unsafe at home due to threats or harsh treatment. Emotional abuse, such as humiliation or isolation, is often overlooked but widespread. In rural areas, cultural beliefs sometimes prevent women from speaking up. Many perceive abuse as shameful and avoid community reporting.

A 37yrs Female Police Officer, revealed that:

Physical abuse occurs less frequently than verbal abuse but leaves strong psychological impacts. Perceptions of abuse are influenced by education; educated women often recognize subtle forms of abuse that others ignore. Community leaders sometimes downplay abuse to preserve family reputation. These perceptions affect the reporting and prevalence statistics. Awareness campaigns are needed to highlight all forms of abuse.

A 42yrs Female School Teacher, revealed that:

Economic abuse is a significant issue, with women restricted from controlling family resources. Many women perceive neglect or overwork as abuse, but these are often unreported. Social stigma prevents some from seeking help. Prevalence varies by household income, size, and cultural norms.

A 37yrs Female Trader, expressed that:

Abuse is sometimes normalized as part of household hierarchy, affecting women's willingness to speak out. Emotional abuse is most prevalent, followed by physical and economic abuse. Perception of abuse also depends on ethnic and religious beliefs. Younger women are more likely to recognize and report abuse than older generations.

The qualitative interview responses provide deeper insights into how abuse against women is perceived within the community. Respondents from different professional and social backgrounds highlighted several recurring themes, including the normalization of abuse, cultural influences, underreporting, and the various forms of abuse experienced by women. The recognition of multiple forms of abuse highlights the need for broader definitions of abuse in both community awareness programs and policy interventions. Addressing only physical violence may overlook other harmful behaviors that significantly affect women's well-being and family relationships.

The normalization of abuse perpetuate harmful family dynamics and hinder efforts to address gender-based violence. Cultural beliefs that

justify abusive behaviors may reinforce power imbalances within families and make it difficult for victims to seek support or protection. Underreporting was noted and it can prevent victims from accessing legal protection, counseling, and social support. It also makes it challenging for policymakers and institutions to understand the full scope of the problem and develop effective interventions. The findings further suggest that education and awareness campaigns can significantly improve recognition of abusive behaviors and empower women to seek support. Increasing access to education and community sensitization programs may therefore help reduce tolerance for abusive practices. It was also deduced that economic dependence can make women more vulnerable to abuse and reduce their ability to leave harmful situations. Strengthening women's economic empowerment through employment opportunities and financial literacy programs could help address this issue.

Table 3: Effects of Abuse against Women on Family Relationships

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (M)	SD
Abuse reduces trust between spouses	5	10	20	65	80	4.1	0.90
Children's emotional well-being is affected	5	5	15	70	85	4.2	0.88
Family communication has declined	10	15	25	60	70	3.9	0.95
Household decision-making is dominated by men	20	25	30	50	55	3.3	1.12
Abuse leads to separation or divorce	5	10	20	60	85	4.0	0.92

Field Survey: 2025.

The table presents respondents' perceptions regarding the effects of abuse against women on family relationships. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores and standard deviations indicate the level of agreement and the degree of variation among respondents. In respect to abuse reducing trust between spouses ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.90$), a large proportion of respondents agreed (65) or strongly agreed (80) that abuse reduces trust between spouses, while only a few respondents disagreed. The mean score of 4.1 indicates strong agreement among respondents that abusive behavior undermines trust within marital relationships. The relatively low standard deviation (0.90) shows that respondents' opinions were fairly consistent.

For Children's emotional well-being affected data shows that Mean = 4.2 and SD = 0.88. This statement recorded the highest mean score (4.2), with the majority of respondents agreeing (70) or strongly agreeing (85). The low standard deviation (0.88) indicates strong consensus among respondents. The finding suggests that abuse against women has serious consequences not only for the victims but also for children within the family. Children who grow up in environments where abuse occurs may experience emotional distress, anxiety, or behavioral challenges.

In addressing family communication declining, the data shows M = 3.9 and SD = 0.95. Most respondents agreed (60) or strongly agreed (70) that abuse leads to a decline in communication within the family. The mean score of 3.9 reflects a high level of agreement, while the standard deviation (0.95) indicates moderate variation in responses. Effective communication is essential for maintaining strong family relationships. Abuse can create an atmosphere of fear and tension that discourages open dialogue between family members. As communication declines, misunderstandings and conflicts may increase, further weakening family cohesion.

In terms of household decision-making being dominated by men, data shows M = 3.3 and SD = 1.12. Responses to this statement were more mixed. While a number of respondents agreed (50) or strongly agreed (55), others disagreed or remained neutral. The mean score of 3.3 indicates moderate agreement, and the relatively higher standard deviation (1.12) shows greater variation in respondents' views. The findings suggest that gender power imbalance in household decision-making may exist in some families but is not uniformly perceived across the community. In situations where men dominate decision-making, women may have limited autonomy, which can reinforce unequal power relations and contribute to abusive dynamics within the family.

Finally on abuse leading to separation or divorce, data displayed that M = 4.0 and SD = 0.92. A large number of respondents agreed (60) or strongly agreed (85) that abuse can lead to separation or divorce. The mean score of 4.0 indicates strong agreement among respondents, and the relatively low standard deviation (0.92) suggests consistent responses. This finding indicates that abuse can significantly destabilize marital relationships and may ultimately lead to family breakdown. Separation or divorce can have broader social and emotional consequences, particularly for children, and may contribute to long-term changes in family structure.

Data from interview sessions are presented here. A 63yrs traditional leader reveals that:

Abuse damages trust between spouses and erodes open communication. Children often witness conflict, affecting their behavior and school performance. Families experience emotional strain and sometimes fragmentation. Siblings may take sides, worsening relationships. The cycle of abuse affects generational attitudes toward conflict.

A 56yrs political women leader explained that:

Women subjected to abuse often withdraw from family decision-making, reducing household cohesion. Children develop fear and anxiety, and marital communication declines. Emotional bonds weaken between family members. Abuse also creates stress that affects community participation. Long-term effects include diminished family resilience.

A 37yrs police officer shared that:

Abuse leads to isolation of victims, which undermines family support networks. Trust between spouses declines, sometimes permanently. Children may replicate abusive behavior in the future. Household routines and interactions become tense and cautious. Families are less able to cooperate during crises.

A 42yrs school teacher highlights that:

Abuse affects communication, as victims fear retaliation for speaking up. Family members may avoid conflict discussions altogether. Emotional disconnect emerges, and children often feel neglected. The wider extended family may intervene but sometimes reinforces harmful practices. Family stability is weakened overall.

A 37yrs trader said that:

Abuse increases secrecy within the home, preventing problem-solving. Emotional stress leads to arguments and decreased parental guidance for children. Children's education and social development are affected. Trust within the household declines, and relationships with extended family can become strained. Family cohesion suffers, creating long-term instability.

Coping Strategies and Community Interventions

Table 4: Coping Strategies

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean (M)	SD
Families rely on extended family support	5	10	20	70	75	4.0	0.92
Women participate in informal support groups	10	20	30	60	60	3.7	1.05
Community leaders intervene to resolve conflicts	15	20	25	65	55	3.6	1.07
Government intervention is limited	25	30	25	45	55	3.2	1.20
Counseling and awareness programs help reduce family tension	10	15	25	65	65	3.9	1.00

Field Survey: 2025.

The data on Table 4 presents respondents’ perceptions regarding the support systems and interventions available to address abuse against women and its effects on family relationships. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). For families relying on extended family support the data displayed Mean = 4.0 and SD = 0.92. The majority of respondents agreed (70) or strongly agreed (75) that families rely on extended family members for support when dealing with abuse or family conflicts. Only a small number of respondents disagreed. The mean score of 4.0 indicates strong agreement, while the relatively low standard deviation (0.92) shows that responses were consistent across participants.

In terms of women participating in informal support groups Mean = 3.7 and SD = 1.05. A considerable number of respondents agreed (60) or strongly agreed (60) that women participate in informal support groups, although some respondents disagreed or remained neutral. The mean score of 3.7 suggests moderate to high agreement, while the standard deviation (1.05) indicates some variation in responses. This suggests that informal networks such as women’s associations, religious groups, or community gatherings provide a platform for women to share experiences and seek emotional support. These groups may help victims cope with the psychological effects of abuse and encourage them to seek assistance.

For community leaders who intervene to resolve conflicts, that data shows a Mean = 3.6 and SD = 1.07. Most respondents agreed (65) or strongly agreed (55) that community leaders often intervene to resolve family conflicts. The mean score of 3.6 reflects moderate agreement, while the standard deviation (1.07) indicates some diversity in respondents' opinions. This finding suggests that traditional or community leaders play an important role in conflict resolution within families. Their involvement may help maintain social harmony and prevent disputes from escalating.

In addressing Government intervention being limited, the data displayed a Mean = 3.2 and SD = 1.20. Responses to this statement were more divided. While some respondents agreed (45) or strongly agreed (55) that government intervention is limited, a notable number disagreed or remained neutral. The mean score of 3.2 indicates only moderate agreement, and the higher standard deviation (1.20) suggests greater variability in responses. This result suggests that respondents perceive gaps in government efforts to address abuse against women. Limited access to legal protection, inadequate support services, or lack of awareness about available resources may contribute to this perception.

In terms of counseling and awareness programmes that help reduce family tension, the data shows a Mean = 3.9 and SD = 1.00. A large number of respondents agreed (65) or strongly agreed (65) that counseling and awareness programs are effective in reducing family tension and addressing abusive behaviors. The mean score of 3.9 indicates strong agreement among respondents, while the standard deviation (1.00) reflects moderate consistency in responses. This finding highlights the importance of educational and counseling initiatives in addressing abuse and promoting healthier family relationships.

From the interview responses, the data are presented. A 63yrs traditional leader:

Families rely on extended kin networks to support victims emotionally and practically. Community elders mediate disputes to reduce escalation. Dialogue sessions and family counseling have been introduced to restore relationships. Religious leaders provide guidance and support. Cultural exchanges promote understanding and reconciliation within families.

A 56yrs political women leader, explained that:

Women form peer support groups to share experiences and advice. Community education programs help victims understand their rights. Families adjust routines to reduce conflict triggers. Counseling services and women's associations mediate between spouses. Awareness campaigns encourage reporting and reduce stigma.

A 37yrs police officer, highlights that:

Small cooperative groups allow women to travel safely and access resources. Families practice internal counseling and conflict resolution. Youth associations organize activities promoting tolerance and mutual respect. Traditional leaders intervene in disputes. Joint community meetings foster dialogue across affected households.

A 42yrs school teacher, expressed that:

Elders counsel families to avoid escalation and maintain communication. Women are empowered to mediate household conflicts. Families participate in community forums focused on peaceful coexistence. Religious leaders and NGOs provide support and mediation. Trust-building exercises are encouraged within and between households.

A 37yrs trader, explained that:

Communities employ early warning systems for domestic disputes. Victims are supported through social networks and counseling. Women's associations lead initiatives for family cohesion. Mediation by elders and leaders helps restore trust. Education and awareness programs teach nonviolent communication and conflict management within families.

The reliance on extended family and community mediation reflects the importance of informal support systems in maintaining family stability. However, while these mechanisms can promote reconciliation and emotional support, they may sometimes prioritize family unity over addressing the root causes of abuse. Women's support networks can empower victims by providing emotional encouragement, practical guidance, and a sense of solidarity. The involvement of respected community figures can enhance the effectiveness of mediation efforts and encourage families to adopt peaceful conflict resolution strategies. Their influence can also help reinforce social norms that discourage abusive behaviour. Awareness and educational programs can play a vital role in

changing attitudes toward abuse and promoting healthier family relationships. Preventive strategies can help reduce the likelihood of abuse by promoting communication, understanding, and conflict resolution skills. Engaging youth and community members in these efforts can contribute to long-term cultural change.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that abuse against women is widely perceived as a significant issue with serious implications for family relationships. The survey results indicate strong agreement among respondents that women experience various forms of abuse, particularly physical, emotional, and economic abuse. Emotional and verbal abuse were perceived as especially common, while economic abuse, such as restricting women's control over household resources, was also identified as a significant concern. The interview responses support these findings, with participants noting that abuse often occurs in subtle forms that may not always be recognized or reported.

The study also shows that abuse has profound consequences for family relationships. The quantitative data indicate that abusive behavior reduces trust between spouses, negatively affects children's emotional well-being, and leads to a decline in family communication. Respondents also agreed that abuse can contribute to marital conflict and, in some cases, separation or divorce. These findings suggest that abuse not only affects individual victims but also undermines the stability and cohesion of the entire family unit.

The findings further highlight the influence of cultural norms and gender power dynamics on the perception and persistence of abuse. In some cases, abusive behaviour is normalized within household hierarchies or viewed as part of family discipline, which discourages victims from speaking out. Interview participants also indicated that factors such as education, generational differences, and cultural beliefs shape how individuals recognize and respond to abusive behaviour.

Another important finding is the issue of underreporting. Many victims do not report abuse due to fear of stigma, social pressure, or the desire to protect family reputation. As a result, many cases remain hidden and unresolved, limiting the effectiveness of formal interventions. The study also reveals that informal support systems play a significant role in addressing abuse and family conflicts. Extended family networks,

women's support groups, community leaders, and religious institutions often provide emotional support, counseling, and mediation for affected families. While these community-based mechanisms help manage conflicts and restore relationships, the findings suggest that formal institutional responses, particularly government interventions, are perceived as limited. Overall, the findings demonstrate that abuse against women is a complex social problem influenced by cultural, economic, and social factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the prevalence, perceptions, effects, and coping strategies related to abuse against women in the Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State. A safe environment allows women to participate fully in decision-making processes, pursue educational and economic opportunities, and raise children in stable and nurturing homes. Consequently, ensuring the safety of women is not only a matter of individual rights but also a critical factor in promoting social stability and sustainable development. Creating a safe and supportive environment for women is essential for the wellbeing of families and the development of society. When women are protected from abuse and treated with dignity, they are better able to contribute positively to their families, communities, and the economy. Addressing harmful cultural perceptions that justify abuse is crucial in preventing violence and promoting gender equality.

Strengthening family relationships through mutual respect, open communication, and peaceful conflict resolution can help create healthier and more stable homes. At the same time, providing effective coping and support mechanisms such as counselling services, social support networks, legal assistance, and economic empowerment can help survivors recover and rebuild their lives. Overall, preventing abuse against women requires collective efforts from individuals, families, communities, and institutions. Through awareness, support systems, and community engagement, societies can promote a culture of respect, dignity, and protection for all women.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were reached:

Promote Public Awareness and Education on Abuse Against Women: Governments, community leaders, and educational institutions should intensify awareness programmes to educate the public about the different forms of abuse against women and their harmful consequences. Such programmes should aim to challenge cultural beliefs and social attitudes

that normalise violence, while promoting gender equality, respect, and healthy relationships within families and communities.

Strengthen Family Counselling and Support Systems: Family counselling services and conflict-resolution programmes should be encouraged within communities to help couples and families manage disagreements peacefully. Strengthening family support systems can improve communication, reduce domestic conflicts, and create healthier family environments that discourage abusive behaviour and promote mutual respect among family members.

Enhance Community-Based Support and Empowerment for Survivors: Communities should establish and strengthen support structures such as counselling centres, women's support groups, and legal assistance services to help survivors cope with abuse. In addition, empowerment initiatives such as skills acquisition and economic support programmes can help women gain independence, build resilience, and reduce their vulnerability to abuse.

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