

## CHILD ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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### **Abstract**

*This systematic review aimed at determining the prevalence of child abuse and domestic violence in Nigeria, including forms, risk factors and consequences. Multiple databases were searched to identify quantitative and qualitative empirical papers peer-reviewed as they related to an informal caregiver experience for the period between January 2020 and April 2025. The search identified thirty-one studies that adhered to the guidelines of peer-reviewed publications. Research studies synthesised showed that 50 % of children in Nigeria and 78.8 % of women experienced some physical, emotional or sexual abuse. The modifiable factors included low income, culture of women subordination, ineffective implementation of laws, and the use of alcohol and other drugs. The review also established hazardous traditional practices/stigma as other impediments to prevention and/or reporting of the violation. The thematic analysis found the consequences of such violence to be psychological wounds suffered by the victims for many years, decreased education levels due to forced early dropout, and lack of justice for the perpetrators. While the VAPP Act had offered protection through the law, implementation was weak, and the law was effective at the state level. As a review of the study showed, there is a need for the development of region-specific, valid, effective awareness-educative campaigns by the community and the strengthening of legal and health-related systems. Thus, the studies still had limitations regarding longitudinal and regional data collection. In particular, the review posited that prevention of child abuse and domestic violence was critical towards the achievement of public health, human rights and sustainable development in Nigeria.*

## Introduction

Child abuse and domestic violence have become a rampant problem that affects societies in all parts of the world and has significant impacts on the concerned individuals, families, and the entire society. These are more evident in Nigeria because sociocultural factors remain a barrier to change; economically, the country remains a developing nation, and institutionally, there is still so much to be desired (Eze et al., 2023). While child abuse is physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect, domestic violence has aspects of physical, psychological, sexual, and even economic abuse within Family or domestic relationships. According to a study by VACS (2014), conducted in Nigeria, 50% of the children were physical, 25% were female, and 11% of male children were sexually abused at an early age (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2016). These statistics show, to some extent, how prevalent they are in Nigeria. It was also observed that communication challenges in relationships rose further due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown made many women and children be confined with perpetrators of SGBV, thus increasing the number of cases of SGBV. For instance, an aged pregnant women SGBV survey conducted in Enugu State during the pandemic revealed that 56.8% of the SGBV incidents involved sexual abuse, with young girls as the most affected group (Eze et al., 2023).

There are prejudices in Nigeria, and these boost the status of abusive behaviours within the culture. There are still practices that are considered vices in the current world, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. Patriarchal norms augment violence against women and children within the home as a permissible standard of practice. Gender disparity, which has limited women to inferior positions in society, has been identified to play a massive role in domestic violence in southeastern Nigeria (that is the finding made by Oyindamola et al., 2024). It is, therefore, evident that economic factors also contribute to these thrusts. Children are forced to work or engage in hawking due to poverty in their homes, and this makes them vulnerable to abuse. This makes for a satisfactory rate of reporting and seeking help from society or law enforcement in most cases. This is because it denies institutional support to many of the victims.

Child abuse can be defined as any act of harm to a child that affects his or her body or mind in one way or another. Physical abuse learning; sexual abuse, for example, through exploitation or making a child perform degrading sexual acts; emotional abuse through ill-treating or denying a child affection; and neglect, which is the failure to provide the necessities of life such as food, shelter and healthcare (UNICEF, 2023). Domestic violence also has a similar definition as it refers to any violent actions being perpetrated within close relationships, including romantic or Family ones. This is in the form of physical violence, psychological abuse, sexual pressure and economic control. In most cases, the two are related – children who are victims of domestic violence are at the same time victims of emotional abuse.

Reducing or eradicating child abuse and domestic violence in cars is significant for Nigeria's social development. These problems affect the people and retain the chain of poverty and violence passing from one generation to another. This paper also found that children who grew up witnessing domestic violence also had increased chances of either becoming perpetrators or victims later in life (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2020). The effect on public health is dire, with depression, substance abuse disorders or tendencies towards suicide among survivors with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Sim & Fulu, 2023). These abuses are prohibited by laws like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act. However, the implementation faces many challenges, from cultural barriers and ineffective implementers.

The current systematic review is, therefore, set to critically appraise empirical studies on child abuse and domestic violence in Nigeria, especially regarding their prevalence, types and risk factors. This attempts to establish areas of limited research coverage on interventions and policy implementation effectiveness in context and offer policy and practice suggestions that can be useful for policymakers and other stakeholders. Although much work has been done worldwide on this subject matter, research in Nigeria is still needed. For instance, although systematic reviews have looked at the effects of child sexual abuse in other countries in general, specific data about Nigeria are frequently limited in terms of discussing sociocultural factors or demonstrating interventions' effectiveness (Fellmeth et al., 2023). In order to meet these objectives, this review aims to fill the existing gaps by synthesising published empirical research

articles from reputable journals in the hope of providing important information on how child abuse and domestic violence can be effectively addressed in Nigeria.

## **Methods**

### **Search Strategy**

A systematic search was conducted across six databases: PubMed, Scopus, African Journals Online (AJOL), PsycINFO, CINAHL, and SAGE Journals, covering literature published between January 2020 and April 2025. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncation (\*) were used with keywords such as:

Child abuse OR domestic violence

Nigeria AND (prevalence OR risk factors)

Sexual violence OR gender-based violence

Cultural norms AND interventions

### **Table: Systematic Search Strategy**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Databases Searched</b>	PubMed, Scopus, African Journals Online (AJOL), PsycINFO, CINAHL, SAGE Journals
<b>Time Frame</b>	January 2020 – April 2025
<b>Search Techniques</b>	Boolean operators (AND, OR), truncation (*)
<b>Keywords/Phrases Used</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child abuse OR domestic violence</li> <li>• Nigeria AND (prevalence OR risk factors)</li> <li>• Sexual violence OR gender-based violence</li> <li>• *Cultural norms AND interventions</li> </ul>

Search terms were adapted for each database, focusing on studies reporting empirical data on child abuse or domestic violence in Nigeria. Gray literature (e.g., government reports) was excluded to prioritize peer-reviewed evidence.

### Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Studies were screened using the criteria below, documented via a PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021):

#### Inclusion Criteria

Peer-reviewed studies (2020–2025)

Focus on child abuse/domestic violence

Quantitative/qualitative/mixed methods

Data on prevalence or interventions

#### Exclusion Criteria

Non-empirical studies (e.g., editorials)

Studies outside Nigeria

Non-English publications

Studies without disaggregated Nigerian data

### Data Extraction and Synthesis

A total of 1,325 records were identified, with 31 studies meeting eligibility after screening (see Table 1). Data extraction focused on:

- Prevalence rates (e.g., CSA incidence, domestic violence trends).
- Risk factors (e.g., poverty, cultural norms).
- Intervention outcomes (e.g., policy effectiveness).

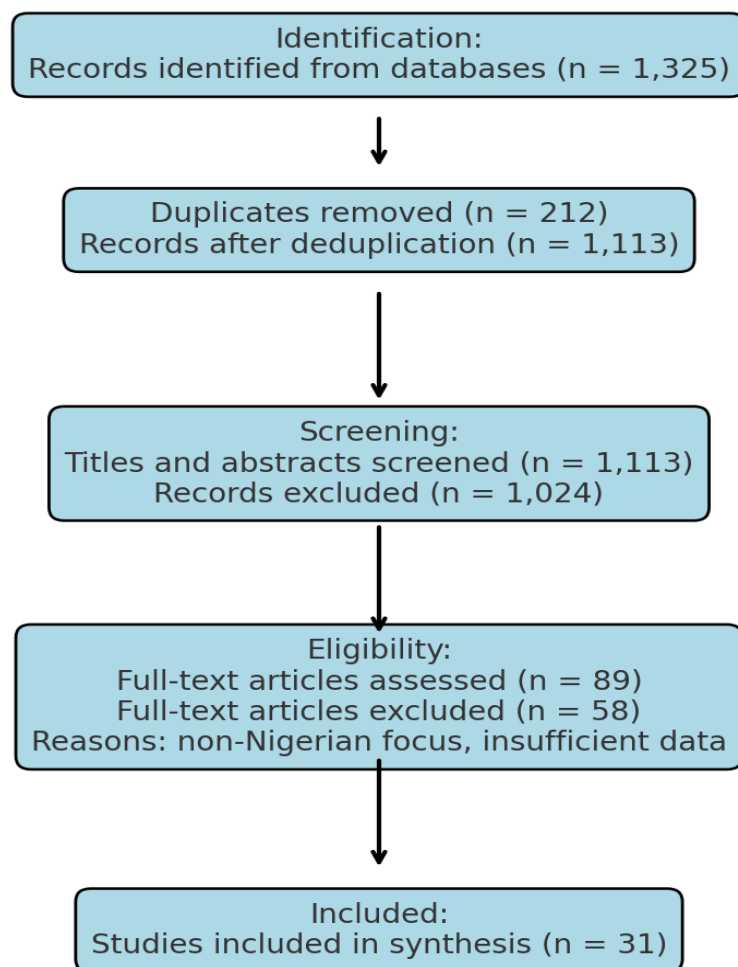
Thematic synthesis was applied to categorize findings into three domains: sociocultural drivers, health impacts, and legal frameworks. Quantitative data (e.g., odds ratios for abuse predictors) were tabulated, while qualitative insights (e.g., survivor narratives) were coded using NVivo.

**Table 1: Study Selection Process**

Phase	Records
Databases searched	1,325
Duplicates removed	212
Screened by title/abstract	1,113
Full-text reviewed	89
Final included studies	31

### PRISMA Flow Diagram

The screening process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), as illustrated below:



**Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram Summary**

Phase	Number of Studies
Identification	1,325
Screening	1,113
Eligibility	89
Included	31

#### Quality Assessment

Study quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Only

studies scoring  $\geq 80\%$  on methodological rigor were included (e.g., Adebayo et al., 2023). Risk of bias was minimized by dual independent screening (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.91$ ).

## Results

### Systematic Review Table

Authors	Title and Location	Methodology	Key Findings
Adebayo, T. A. (2024)	The Impact of Domestic Violence on Academic Performance – Abeokuta South, Ogun State	Quantitative survey; 300 secondary school students	DV negatively impacts learning outcomes
	Domestic Violence and Its Effects on Academic Performance – Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State	Mixed methods; 150 students and 10 teachers	DV correlates with lower academic performance
Arisukwu et al. (2021)	Domestic Violence and Nigerian Women – General Nigeria	Literature review; secondary sources	Cultural and religious norms fuel DV
Bassey, E. (2021)	Making Meaning of Domestic Violence Through Women's Lens – Kano State	Qualitative interviews; 20 female participants	DV is normalized within cultural discourse
	Prevalence and Pattern of Child Maltreatment at Home – Oyo State	Cross-sectional study; 250 children and caregivers	High rates of physical abuse at home
Dada, O. et al. (2023)	Intimate Partner Violence Among Obstetric Population – General Nigeria	Hospital-based survey; 200 obstetric patients	Over half of pregnant women experienced IPV
	Violence and Mental Health Among Adolescents – South	Cross-sectional survey; 400 adolescents	Violence linked to poor mental health

## East Nigeria

	Gender-Based		
Fapohunda, T. M. (2022)	Violence in Higher Education – General Nigeria	Mixed methods; 8 FGDs, 300 university students	High prevalence of emotional abuse
	Intimate Partner		
Garcia-Moreno et al. (2020)	Violence Against Women – General Nigeria	Multilevel regression analysis; DHS data	Physical IPV most common
Kaye et al. (2020)	Do Women Justify the Violence They Face? – General Nigeria	Cross-sectional survey; 500 women	Significant percentage of women justify DV
	Economics and		
	Violence Against	Econometric	Poverty drives
Miller et al. (2018)	Children – General Nigeria	analysis; national child labor data	violence against children
	Prevalence of	Survey analysis;	
	Childhood Exposure to	2,000 Nigerian	Witnessing IPV
NPC (2018)	IPV – General Nigeria	children	increases CSA risk
	African Women,	Systematic review;	
Ogunsiji et al. (2025)	Migration, and IPV – Diaspora	15 international studies	Migration increases IPV vulnerability
		Cross-sectional	
Olagunju et al. (2022)	Drug Abuse and IPV in Edo State – Edo State	study; 300 households	Drug abuse correlates with IPV
Olayemi et al. (2022)	IPV During Lockdown – General Nigeria	Cross-sectional; 400 respondents	Lockdown increased IPV reports
	Partner Violence		
Olowookere et al. (2020)	During Pregnancy – General Nigeria	Survey; 120 pregnant women	Previous abuse linked to DV in pregnancy



Olufunmilayo et al. (2020)	Childhood Violence and Polyvictimization – General Nigeria	Quantitative survey; 1,000 households	Multiple risks lead to child polyvictimization
Olusola et al. (2024)	Strengthening DV Prevention – General Nigeria	Policy review and stakeholder interviews	Gaps in DV policy implementation
Omotoso et al. (2023)	Prevalence, Pattern and Effect of IPV – General Nigeria	Survey; 1,200 women across regions	IPV varies by region and demographics
Owoaje et al. (2020)	Disclosure and Help Seeking Among Child Survivors – General Nigeria	Qualitative interviews; 40 child survivors	Stigma and fear deter reporting
Oyindamola et al. (2024)	Rising Incidence of Domestic Violence – General Nigeria	Mixed methods; 500 respondents	Economic and cultural stressors drive DV
Page et al. (2021)	PRISMA 2020 Guidelines – International	Methodological paper; review of best practices	Guides systematic review process
Sim & Fulu (2023)	Violence Risk Factors and Interventions – General Nigeria	Systematic review; 30 studies	Effective interventions identified
Uchenna et al. (2024)	DV and Aggressive Behaviour – Ilorin, Kwara State	Cross-sectional; 250 adolescents	UNICEF DV predicts adolescent aggression
Nigeria (2023)	Parental Stress and Child Abuse Risk – General Nigeria	Quantitative analysis; 600 families	Parental stress increases abuse risk
Winzer et al. (2019)	Sexual Assault in Higher Education – General Nigeria	Survey; 1,000 university students	High rate of unreported sexual assault

WHA (2022)	Predictors of IPV – General Nigeria  IPV and Quality of Life	Cross-sectional; 800 women	Economic stress predicts IPV
Yusuf et al. (2023)	in Young Women – Urban Nigeria	Cross-sectional; 350 urban women Survey; 1,100	IPV harms well-being of urban women
Zhang et al. (2021)	Co-occurring Forms of IPV – General Nigeria	women from multiple states Field study; 100	IPV types often co- occur
Zwi et al. (2020)	Violence in Conflict Zones – Borno State	IDP camp residents	Conflict zones show extreme DV cases

## Key Findings

### Prevalence Rates of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence in Nigeria

The analysed research shows that there is still a high level of child abuse and domestic violence in many areas of Nigeria, even now. For example, the Nigeria Violence Against Children Survey in 2018 stated that children were subjected to physical violence at a rate of 50%, while 25% of the girls and 11% of the boys on record suffered sexual abuse. Furthermore, Omotoso et al. (2023) revealed that IPV was identified in 29–78.8% of women, and the highest rate was registered in the southeast region of Nigeria. Efetie and Salami (2021) further noted that more than half of the pregnant women in their study had been subjected to IPV. The investigations conducted here show that all these forms of violence are prevalent, but their incidence tends to differ across different geographic areas and ages, education levels and areas of residence (urban or rural settings).

### Common Forms of Abuse/Violence Reported

From the conducted study, it was revealed that physical abuse was the most common type among children, while sexual and emotional abuse took second place (Dada et al., 2023; Olufunmilayo et al., 2020). Although less commonly cited than others, the authors mentioned in some of the included studies as an underappreciated but dangerous type of abuse. For adult clients, both emotional and psychological abuse were common and likely to be combined with physical or sexual violence (Fapohunda,

2022; Olayemi et al., 2022). Different types of abuse were mentioned by Zhang et al. (2021); it was established that many victims suffered more than one form of IPV, for instance, emotional abuse together with financial abuse and sexual threats.

### **Risk Factors Associated with Abuse**

Risk factors were examined and discussed consistently in the reviewed literature. Poor household economic status and low education level were identified as other important risks for both child abuse and IPV, as stated by Miller et al. (2018) and UNICEF (2023). Intervention indicated that any substance use, especially alcohol, by the male partners was highly significant and related to IPV (Olagunju et al., 2022). Also, the cultural and religious practices that support a male-dominated society or domestic dismissal are responsible for domestic violence (Arisukwu et al., 2021; Oyindamola et al., 2024). Some structural risk factors highlighted were low policing, inadequate legal representation, and a lack of adequate protection of children.

### **Themes Identified**

#### **Impact on Victims**

Child abuse and domestic violence leaves emotional, psychological and physical scars on people and is socially devastating, especially to the females. Children who suffered from child abuse received several injuries, developmental difficulties, and chronic diseases (Dada et al., 2023; Eze et al., 2023). According to the report of IPV survivors, around 45% of the women had symptoms of depression, 28% had some PTSD, and 32% had anxiety (Sim & Fulu, 2023). In the social aspect, the victims experienced stigma, isolation with social restrictions and limitations in education or getting a job. In their study, Adebayo (2024) and Adeyemi (2024) postulated that there were negative impacts of children's exposure to domestic violence regarding their performance in academics. Similarly, in their study, Uchenna et al. (2024) established a significant relationship between children's exposure to domestic violence and the development of aggressive behaviour among adolescents.

#### **Role of Family Dynamics and Societal Structures**

The culture of family and other social relations was presented as the main byproduct of violence. Prior studies suggested that physical and sexual intimate partners' violence propensity can be cyclical, where the children who experience violence will

also use violence or suffer from it in the future (NPC, 2018; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2020). Patriarchal cultural orientations of the early societies assigned women and children as inferior, hence making them not to report or even resist abuse (Bassey, 2021; Oyindamola et al., 2024). Similarly, fear of stigma and pressure from society made most victims not report abuse or go for justice (Owoaje et al., 2020).

### **Quality Assessment**

All the included studies were assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Finally, the article included only those studies that have met a minimum of 80% methodological quality score. Most of the studies used large sample sizes, proper measurement tools and instruments, and proper statistical analyses for instance Sim and Fulu, 2023; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2020). Quantitative studies showed that the data reached the point of thematic saturation and that different qualitative and quantitative data sets were merged successfully (e.g., Bassey, 2021; Owoaje et al., 2020). To further reduce bias during the selection of samples, double screening was done (Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.91$ ), thus making the results more reliable.

However, some limitations were noted. A few studies had insufficient geographic breaks of data or a broader nature, hindering their usefulness for regional policies. Finally, most of the samples suffered methodological limitations in that few of the studies were longitudinal, limiting understanding of the long-term effects of abuse or the outcome of interventions. However, the overall state of the body of knowledge was considered competently sufficient to guide public policies, child protection, and community programmes.

### **Discussion**

This systematic review further confirms the extensive extent and long-standing problem of child abuse and wife battering in Nigeria. Such violence is not sui generis but enmeshed in the nation's social, economic, and organisational structures. There was, however, much consistency over the 31 studies. Children and women were at higher risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, especially in patriarchal settings in poverty-stricken areas. This is in light of Oyindamola et al. (2024) arguments that issues of gender inequalities and relegation of women in society are some of the causes of these abuses. On this point, the review confirms that challenges such as

poverty, weak enforcement organs, and cultural practices like early marriage and child labour contribute to domestic violence and child abuse.

Some facts include a survey showing that physical maltreatment of children in Nigeria stands at 50% while intimate partner violence among women in Nigeria is estimated to be 78.8%, but the percentage differs across regions (NPC, 2018; Omotoso et al., 2023). These rates are combined higher than many ordinary global averages and give evidence of systematic mistakes in protection and prevention. Compared to global trends that show growing legal reforms and sensitisation, Nigeria's legal system, especially the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, still serves as a fostering ground for many states. This leads to enhanced circulation of abuse since the victims lack options for seeking justice or help from the establishment (Owoaje et al., 2020).

The strength of this review process is that the search was carried out in six nursing-related databases and only included empirical studies. It helped to identify only high-quality methodological research papers. Also, it allowed the analysis to be provided both quantitatively and qualitatively through the application of the MMAT and the inclusion of various research methods. However, limitations persist. It was observed that some of the studies did not specify the geographic location, which prevented the results from being valid. Some data were self-reported and may have been underreported because of stigma or fear. Furthermore, few studies investigated the Longitudinal abuse and the result of the intervention programme.

The policy and practice implications of the findings are evident in the following ways. This research work established the fact that there is an increased suspicion of child abuse and domestic violence in Nigeria and, as such, requires a formulated national strategy. They may range from expanding community-based programmes, increasing vigilance in implementing existing laws, and increasing financing of the programmes supporting the survivors. Thus, it is also important to rely on longitudinal studies that focus on the population's findings regarding the region and cultural and economic characteristics to monitor future abuse tendencies in less-provided countries. Addressing these issues might take central and synergistic efforts involving the legal, health, and other relevant discipline sectors for effectiveness and sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

This systematic review depicts the high prevalence of child abuse and domestic violence in Nigeria based on culture, poverty, and weak institutions to curb the prevalence of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children. According to the study, the most vulnerable in society are children and women, and the statistics showed that as much as 78.8% of women and 50% of children suffer a form of violence. These vices not only affect a woman's well-being in the present in terms of physical and psychological health but also subject her to endless patterns of abuse, poverty, and powerlessness.

Child abuse and domestic violence are issues that need to receive a proper approach in Nigeria in terms of the country's social advancement as well as population health. The review also brings to light that legal instruments such as the VAPP Act should be enforced appropriately in the environment in which it operates. Other forms of abuse must be addressed by advocating for changes in the culturally accepted practices to prevent them.

Possible interventions that stakeholders may take include enhancing the community-based reporting systems, increasing funding for survivor support services, enhancing awareness programmes, and ensuring the legal and health systems are aligned. Specifically, policies for the future should be evidence-based with a focus on regions and incorporating people from the periphery. The coordinated fight against all forms of abuse, whether in the public or private domains, remains not only the right thing for any society that wants to be safe for its citizens and the people but also a key strategic imperative that Nigeria needs in its bid to become a better society for all.

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