



COMMUNITY-BASED PEACE ACTORS AND THE PREVENTION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG DISPLACED MINORS IN KATSINA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT: *Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical protection challenge among displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis, where insecurity, poverty, and disrupted social structures heighten vulnerability. This study examines how survival-based coping strategies, including sexual exploitation, emerge from structural vulnerabilities such as economic hardship and weakened protection systems. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from survivor narratives, interviews with community-based peace actors, and civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in GBV prevention and response. Findings show that community-based peace actors play key roles in identifying at-risk minors, providing rescue and temporary protection, mediating disputes, and coordinating referrals to formal support services. Collaboration between community institutions and CSOs strengthens survivor pathways but is constrained by stigma, limited resources, and delays in formal mechanisms. The study argues that GBV prevention should be treated as a local peacebuilding priority. Key recommendations include strengthening community-based peace mechanisms, integrating GBV prevention into peace and security programming, expanding food, shelter, and psychosocial support for displaced girls, and enhancing coordination among government, donors, and local actors to sustain protective systems.*

KEYWORDS: Gender-Based Violence; Displaced Minors; Sexual Exploitation; Community-Based Peacebuilding; Conflict and Displacement.



INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's North-West has experienced escalating insecurity driven by banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence, resulting in widespread displacement and heightened vulnerability among women and children (Ojewale et al., 2024). Unlike ideologically driven insurgencies in the North-East, violence in the region is largely economically motivated, including cattle rustling and ransom kidnappings, yet its humanitarian consequences remain severe. Diminished state protection has displaced thousands, forcing many families into informal host communities with limited access to services (Muhammad et al., 2022).

Displacement compounds age- and gender-related vulnerabilities as family and community protection systems weaken (Abdulgani et al., 2024). Displaced minors often face precarious living conditions characterised by limited access to food, shelter, healthcare, and education, alongside psychological distress resulting from exposure to violence and instability (Muhammad et al., 2022). Economic insecurity and livelihood loss increase dependency and survival pressures, creating conditions in which exploitative coping strategies, including transactional sex, emerge—particularly among adolescent girls (Ajibade et al., 2025).

Studies in Northern Nigeria report high levels of gender-based violence (GBV) among adolescents, including emotional, physical, economic, and sexual abuse, occurring across everyday community spaces (Ajibade et al., 2025). Girls face intersecting vulnerabilities shaped by gender, age, and socio-economic insecurity, while boys encounter risks such as hazardous labour and recruitment into armed groups (Koris et al., 2022; Muhammad et al., 2022). These dynamics highlight how displacement amplifies existing inequalities and undermines social cohesion.

Community-based interventions have shown promise in preventing GBV. Traditional leaders, religious institutions, women's groups, and youth networks contribute to conflict management and social cohesion, while faith-informed initiatives strengthen protection through local legitimacy and trust (Eitu et al., 2023; Ganira et al., 2025). However, most existing research focuses on northeastern Nigeria, particularly Maiduguri and Borno State, leaving empirical gaps regarding Katsina Metropolis. Understanding how local peace actors operate within this context is critical for strengthening localised protection strategies.

This study, therefore, examines the role of community-based peace actors in preventing GBV among displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis. Specifically, it identifies the forms and drivers of GBV, explores survivor experiences, and assesses community actors' roles in prevention and response. By linking GBV prevention with localized peacebuilding, the study offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening community-based protection in conflict-affected settings.



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a multi-layered conceptual framework integrating four dimensions: gender-based violence (GBV) as a threat to peace and social cohesion, community-based peace actors and local protection mechanisms, Infrastructure for Peace (I4P), and the intersection of youth and gender in fragile contexts. Together, these dimensions provide an analytical lens for understanding how community interventions can prevent GBV among displaced minors while advancing peacebuilding goals.

GBV as a Threat to Peace and Social Cohesion

GBV is both a consequence and driver of conflict, undermining social stability and collective security. Conflict environments normalize violence through militarization, resource scarcity, and weakened social regulation (Mootz et al., 2017). Displacement further elevates risks as family and community protective structures collapse (Abdulgani et al., 2024). GBV erodes trust, reinforces gender inequalities, and demonstrates how harmful norms become embedded in social governance, highlighting the need for structural and normative interventions (Krause et al., 2019; Sommer et al., 2018).

Community-Based Peace Actors and Local Protection

Community actors - including traditional leaders, religious groups, women's organisations, and youth networks play crucial roles in preventing and responding to GBV due to their proximity, legitimacy, and contextual knowledge (Eitu et al., 2023). Evidence shows that community-based interventions can reduce tolerance for violence and strengthen protective norms (Koris et al., 2022). Faith-based and culturally grounded organisations further enhance protection through advocacy, engagement with men and boys, and gender-transformative programming (Ganira et al., 2025).

Infrastructure for Peace (I4P)

I4P refers to institutionalised mechanisms enabling communities to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict while protecting vulnerable groups. This study, it encompasses traditional governance structures, religious institutions, and civil society networks that collectively form a local protection ecosystem. Early warning systems and coordinated responses enable actors to address risks proactively, demonstrating the importance of collaboration among diverse actors in strengthening peace infrastructures (Chinwokwu et al., 2015; Nwaka et al., 2020; Post et al., 2009).

Youth and Gender in Fragile Settings

Adolescent girls in displacement settings face heightened risks of exclusion, exploitation, and violence due to intersecting vulnerabilities (Ajibade et al., 2025; Koris et al., 2022). Simultaneously, youth can act as agents of change. Effective GBV prevention requires engaging both girls and boys in gender-transformative programming, promoting nonviolence and equality, and fostering long-term norm change (Sommer et al., 2018; Katembo et al., 2015).



Integrating these dimensions provides a foundation for analysing GBV prevention among displaced minors. GBV interventions must address structural drivers and transform harmful social norms. Community ownership ensures sustainable protection, while institutionalised mechanisms identify and respond systematically to threats. Recognising youth as both vulnerable and active participants further strengthens social cohesion and local peacebuilding processes. This framework guides the study's analysis of community-based peace actors in Katsina Metropolis.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the role of community-based peace actors in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) among displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with leaders of community-based peace institutions, survivors of sexual exploitation, and a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) coordinator. Participants were purposively selected based on direct experience with GBV prevention and response. The researchers interviewed a total of five (5) survivors of GBV who reported their cases to the Katsina State Hisbah Command. Since the establishment of the Hisbah Board in 2024, it has provided a haven for reporting different cases of violation of human rights, including GBV cases in Katsina State. However, in rural areas, survivors due to poverty or illiteracy cannot come to the Katsina city lodge to lodge their complaint before the appropriate authorities.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically, focusing on forms and drivers of GBV, survivor experiences, and the role of community actors, guided by the study objectives.

Given the sensitivity of GBV research, participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained. was ensured through anonymisation, and interviews were conducted using trauma-sensitive approaches.

FINDINGS:

Forms of GBV Among Displaced Minors

Displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis experience multiple, interconnected forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation, coercion, and emotional harm, closely tied to insecurity, poverty, and weakened protective structures.

Sexual Exploitation and Survival-Based Abuse

Sexual exploitation among displaced minors is shaped by economic vulnerability, weak community protection, and power imbalances between adults and children. Perpetrators often use gifts, food, or promises to gain access to minors, reflecting survival-based and coercive dynamics.



A survivor's caregiver explained:

My daughter returned home with money, biscuits and soft drinks... later she revealed that a man gave them to her. When I checked, I discovered she had been violated. (Survivor Interview).

Community participants confirmed that sexual abuse involving guardians, teachers, or known community members is increasingly common, while social stigma discourages reporting. Power imbalance remains central, as perpetrators exploit social influence and families avoid reporting due to shame or fear.

"People hide rape cases because of stigma... this encourages offenders because they know nothing will happen." (CSO interview).

These findings show that GBV is not only a criminal issue but also reflects structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, weak enforcement, and social norms discouraging disclosure.

Survivor Experiences: Trauma, Pregnancy, and Stigma

Survivor narratives highlight significant psychological and social consequences. Emotional trauma, fear, and long-term insecurity are prevalent. Caregivers reported distress, fear of social judgment, and concern for the child's future.

"This is the most painful thing that has happened in my life... he capitalised on her innocence and exploited her." (Survivor Interview)

Some survivors experienced pregnancy and prolonged emotional distress during legal proceedings. Stigma often leads families to conceal abuse, limiting access to justice and psychosocial support.

Family responses varied: some sought justice via community institutions or authorities, while others attempted quiet settlements due to embarrassment or community pressure, as explained during an interview. "Families feel it is shameful to pursue a GBV case... they often hide it." (CSO Interview)

Positive cases were noted where families collaborated with community peace actors and CSOs to secure protection, temporary shelter, or legal action, indicating gradual improvement in awareness and willingness to seek support.

Role of Community-Based Peace Actors

Community-based peace actors, including community leaders, faith-based institutions, and local protection agencies, play a key role in preventing and responding to GBV. Their functions complement formal legal structures by providing mediation, protection, referral, and social stabilisation.



Rescue and Protection

Community actors frequently identify at-risk minors and remove them from abusive situations. Families often prefer reporting cases to trusted community institutions due to accessibility and cultural legitimacy.

“I have trust in them... we contacted them, and they arrested the accused and provided a safe place for us.” (Survivor Interview).

They also facilitate temporary shelter and protection for survivors while investigations continue, helping prevent retaliation and further harm

Mediation, Accountability, and Social Order

Beyond rescue, community actors mediate disputes to prevent escalation and restore social order. Dialogue with families and culturally accepted dispute-resolution mechanisms are often used before referring unresolved cases to formal courts.

“Sometimes we invite parents of both sides and resolve the matter. If it persists, we refer it to court.” (Community Leader Interview).

Mediation addresses domestic violence, denial of maintenance, and exploitation, while referrals to courts or publicised interventions reinforce moral and legal deterrence.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Community actors coordinate rehabilitation and reintegration by linking survivors with families and civil society organisations. Support includes counselling, temporary financial assistance, and stigma reduction.

“Survivors are encouraged to reintegrate and supported to improve their financial status.” (Community Leader Interview).

These efforts are particularly crucial in cases of family rejection or social stigma. threatens survivors’ wellbeing, acting as intermediaries to negotiate household and community acceptance.

Civil Society and Multi-Actor Coordination

Civil society organisations (CSOs) coordinate support for survivors and strengthen community-level protection systems, complementing community-based actors by linking survivors to legal, medical, and psychosocial services.

Role of Civil Society Organisations

CSOs provide legal assistance, counselling, awareness campaigns, and survivor advocacy. Collaborating with legal aid providers, medical professionals, and religious leaders, they help survivors navigate justice processes and access care.



We provide legal support, counselling, and help survivors access hospitals and justice through partnerships with lawyers and medical practitioners. (CSO Interview)

Religious leaders are also integrated into advocacy efforts, particularly awareness campaigns that encourage reporting and reduce stigma.

Referral Pathways and Survivor Support

Coordination between community actors and CSOs establishes referral pathways. Community institutions stabilise cases before referral to CSOs, hospitals, or courts, ensuring continuity of care and justice. Multi-actor partnerships provide shelter, psychosocial support, and legal representation, reducing barriers for survivors.

Institutional Gaps and Coordination Challenges

Despite collaboration, challenges exist: delays in courts, limited funding, weak logistics, stigma, and family pressure sometimes hinder survivors' pursuit of justice.

"Families sometimes see it as shameful to continue with GBV cases, and this affects justice outcomes." (CSO Interview)

Limited coordination among institutions and resources constrains long-term support.

Opportunities for Strengthening Local Peace Architecture

Participants emphasised strengthening partnerships among community leaders, CSOs, government agencies, and faith-based institutions. Capacity-building, legal backing for mediators, and sustained awareness campaigns were identified as key strategies.

Effective GBV prevention relies on interconnected actors operating within a shared local peace framework, where community trust, institutional support, and formal accountability reinforce one another.

DISCUSSION

GBV Prevention, Structural Vulnerability and Peacebuilding

Findings show that gender-based violence (GBV) among displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis threatens both individual safety and social cohesion. Transactional sexual exploitation linked to poverty and displacement insecurity reflects structural vulnerabilities in contexts where state protection is weak (Ojewale et al., 2024; Ajibade et al., 2025). When stigma and fear limit reporting, accountability declines, and violence becomes normalised. GBV therefore operates not only as a gendered harm but as a broader social threat, reinforcing instability. Prevention should thus be understood as both humanitarian protection and a localised peacebuilding strategy.



Community Peace Actors in Violence Prevention

Community-based peace actors—including traditional leaders, faith-based institutions, and local protection agencies—play critical roles in identifying at-risk minors, mediating disputes, confronting perpetrators, and facilitating referrals. Culturally legitimate interventions help reduce retaliation and communal tensions (Eitu et al., 2023). Collaboration with civil society organisations strengthens survivor support through counselling, temporary assistance, and reintegration, gradually shifting norms toward greater protection of girls and youth (Koris et al., 2022).

Strengths and Limitations of Informal Mechanisms

Community-based approaches offer accessibility, rapid response, and cultural legitimacy. However, reliance on mediation may delay formal legal action, and limited resources constrain sustained survivor support. Stigma and family pressures can undermine accountability, underscoring the need for coordination with formal state institutions.

Strengths and Limitations of Informal Peace Mechanisms

Community-based approaches provide accessibility, rapid response, and cultural legitimacy. However, reliance on mediation can delay formal legal action, and resource constraints limit sustained support. Stigma and family pressures may also undermine accountability, highlighting the need for coordination with formal state structures.

POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights the need for integrated strategies that address structural drivers of gender-based violence (GBV) while strengthening local peace mechanisms for displaced minors. Community-based peace actors require institutional recognition, training, and legal backing to improve mediation, survivor protection, and referral coordination. Capacity-building can enhance accountability and trauma-informed practice.

GBV prevention should be treated as a core peacebuilding priority rather than solely a social welfare issue. Peace and security interventions in North-West Nigeria should include early identification of at-risk minors, community awareness campaigns, and collaboration between informal and formal justice institutions to strengthen protection and accountability.

Economic insecurity and limited safe spaces increase exposure to exploitation. Expanding access to food assistance, temporary shelter, education, and psychosocial support can reduce survival-based vulnerabilities and support long-term recovery for displaced girls.

Government and donor initiatives should prioritise partnerships with trusted local actors. Stronger coordination among state agencies, civil society organisations, and community institutions can build sustainable local peace infrastructure and improve survivor support pathways.



CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that community-based peace actors are central to preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) among displaced minors in Katsina Metropolis through mediation, protection, referral, and reintegration support. Their interventions reduce violence and strengthen community cohesion.

Findings show that GBV prevention extends beyond humanitarian protection and constitutes a key component of localised peacebuilding. Strengthening community-driven mechanisms and improving collaboration among civil society, formal institutions, and state actors can enhance protection outcomes and reduce vulnerability.

Sustainable progress requires coordinated state–community–CSO efforts and continued investment in locally grounded strategies addressing both immediate protection needs and structural drivers of violence. Positioning GBV prevention within broader peacebuilding frameworks supports integrated, multi-actor approaches to stabilising conflict-affected settings.

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