How to address alarming rate of gender-based violence in Nigeria – Experts

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A woman is either sexually violated or killed every 10 minutes in Nigeria due to the widespread prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), according to the Salama Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC).  
  
Grace Abbin, Centre Manager at Kaduna State-based SARC, gave the report at the Global Rights Conference on Tuesday in Abuja.  
  
The event, themed, ‘Promoting Effective Community Referral Pathways for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Response,’ brought together experts and advocates from Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to explore ways to combat the growing crisis of violence against women.  
  
“Every ten minutes, a woman is either violated or killed. Violence has short and long-term effects on survivors and their families.  
  
“Impacts can range from physical harm to long-term emotional distress or loss of life. Rape and sexual assault can result in unwanted pregnancies, complications during pregnancy and birth, and STIs, including HIV, and death.  
  
“My statistics are indisputable. We’re asking, where do we stand in addressing gender-based violence? The truth is, we still have a long way to go. However, we are making progress because people are beginning to speak up,” Mrs Abbin stated.  
  
Mrs Abbin recalled that in 2019, the centre recorded just two cases of GBV per month, all involving women. But after raising awareness and encouraging reporting, the figures skyrocketed to 4,426 cases, 3,600 of which involved women.  
  
She explained that the data comes from Zone 3 in Kafanchan, Kaduna State, covering eight local governments. These numbers reflect a sharp rise in cases between February 2019 and January 2025.  
  
Mrs Abbin emphasised the importance of seeing survivors, not as victims, but as resilient individuals who seek to move forward despite their circumstances.  
  
“We don’t call them victims because they are survivors—they want to live and move forward despite their circumstances,” she said.  
  
How to address GBV  
  
According to Mrs Abbin, awareness and the courage to speak out are critical to finding solutions to the menace of GBV.  
  
“Speaking up is crucial to achieving justice. Even if there’s no immediate legal outcome, sometimes just being heard is justice for someone,” she added.  
  
She noted that the crucial role of funding in addressing GBV.  
  
“No one can tackle this alone. The state cannot do it by itself. Service providers need funding to operate effectively. The increasing number of cases requires additional support,” she said, underscoring the need for funding for capacity building, medical treatment for survivors, dignity kits, and economic empowerment programmes.  
  
Noya Sedi, a Senior Programme Officer at Global Rights, pointed out the collaborative efforts to tackle GBV in Northwest Nigeria.  
  
She said local community leaders, support services, and gender rights organisations are working together through initiatives like the creation of Community Dialogue Committees (CDC) and strengthened referral pathways.  
  
She explained that these efforts are beginning to bridge the gap between informal community responses and formal support structures like Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).  
  
Addressing the gap in national security  
  
In his address and overview of the project, Edosa Oviawe, Director of the Programme at Global Rights, stressed that the failure to integrate women into early warning systems and conflict resolution mechanisms has left a dangerous gap in Nigeria’s fight against terrorism, banditry, and mass atrocities.  
  
“For over two decades, we have tracked incidents of large-scale violence across Nigeria,” Mr Oviawe said. “Initially, the North-west had the lowest reports of mass killings. But since 2014, it has steadily climbed to become the most violent region in the country.”  
  
Mr Oviawe attributed part of the issue to the exclusion of women from national security strategies.  
  
“In markets, worship centres, and social gatherings, women overhear critical conversations about impending attacks,” he said. “But because they lack a formal platform to report these threats, the information is lost, and we only react when crises erupt.”  
  
To address this, he said the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is partnering with local organisations like Global Rights to implement programmes that strengthen community resilience and empower women in security decision-making.  
  
He said one such initiative is the Early Warning and Response Coordination (EWRC) app, a digital tool that allows volunteers across communities to report security threats in real-time.  
  
“When women are ignored, entire communities suffer,” Mr Oviawe said. “Women’s exclusion has been a major blind spot in our national security strategy,” he added.  
  
Why GBV is persistent in Nigeria  
  
Some reports have shown that deeply rooted cultural norms often contribute to the persistence of GBV. This is because the notion that males should dominate and women be submissive might foster an environment in which abusive behaviour is normative and allowed. This is because many women are economically dependent on their husbands.  
  
Also, despite the existence of laws to combat GBV, such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015, enforcement remains weak. While this law criminalises various forms of GBV, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking, its implementation is inconsistent across Nigeria.