

# NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC) GBV RESPONSE GUIDANCE NOTES FOR SURVIVORS OF GBV INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



## Objective of this Guidance Note

The purpose of this guidance note is to explain the human rights-based approach/response of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to Gender Based Violence (GBV). It is written for all GBV prevention and response advocates as well as GBV survivors. The Guidance Note explains NHRC's overall approach to GBV and highlights the key NHRC response mechanisms for addressing Sexual /Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

A study commissioned by the Federal ministry of women's affairs and social development and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Nigeria, with support from the Norwegian Government, found out that 28% of Nigerian women aged 25-29 have experienced some form of physical violence since age 15. The study also reports that 15% of women experienced physical violence within 12 months, while 25% of married women or those living with their spouses have experienced violence. The most common acts of violence against women in Nigeria include sexual violence, physical violence, harmful traditional practices, emotional/psychological violence and socio-economic violence.

In view of the extremely damaging effect sexual and gender-based violence and the fact that the abuse is being grossly under-reported, the Commission has taken a hard stance against perpetrators of GBV in order to stem the tide of impunity and protect the society against SGBV.

Survivors of gender-based violence often choose not to report due to various factors. These include fear of disbelief if the perpetrator is powerful, fear of humiliation and stigma, fear of retaliation by the abuser, concern for the safety of the survivor's family, uncertainty about the nature of the violation, victim-blaming based on cultural beliefs, reluctance to report against close family or friends, and lack of faith in the justice system.

This Guidance Note will be useful for governments and specialised institutions interacting with NHRC with mandate to address discrimination and equality issues. The Guidance Note will also be

useful for human rights activists, gender advocates, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and most importantly the survivors of GBV seeking intervention of NHRC.

## About NHRC:

The National Human Rights Commission was established by the NHRC Act, 1995 as amended. Its establishment is aimed at creating an enabling environment for extra – judicial recognition, promotion, protection, and enforcement of human rights treaty obligations and providing a forum for public enlightenment and dialogue on human rights issues including advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The Commission has earmarked the rights of women and related matters as one of its thematic areas of focus.

The Commission serves as an extra-judicial mechanism for the respect and enjoyment of human rights. It also provides avenues for public enlightenment, research, and dialogue in order to raise awareness on Human Rights issues.

NHRC is dedicated to tackling gender-based violence (GBV). This means challenging the social and cultural norms that discriminate against people due to their gender identity and ensuring that survivors of GBV can safely access services.

**Gender equality is the central principle of NHRC, and it is one of the core NHRC thematic focus and targets. Women, girls and vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected and are at higher risk of experiencing GBV. Because of this, NHRC prioritizes addressing both GBV and gender inequality issues specifically.**

# What is Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?

**GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females (i.e., gender)<sup>1</sup>. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such actions, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.**

GBV takes many forms, it can occur both in private and public life and includes intimate partner violence/domestic violence, sexual assault, isolation, and economic exclusion that can lead to survival sex amongst others. While GBV can happen to people of all genders, women, and girls experience most of this type of violence. GBV is a global pandemic that affects one in three women in their lifetimes and is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world.<sup>2</sup>

## GBV Prevention and Response

**GBV prevention consists of interventions which aim to stop GBV from occurring in the first place. Prevention activities aim to address the root causes of GBV by focusing on gender inequality, promoting positive gender norms, and protecting the rights of individuals or groups at risk of gender-based violence.**

Examples of GBV prevention interventions include:

**Mobilizing communities to prevent GBV and change harmful social norms.**

**Engaging men and boys in group dialogue about gender equality and non-violence.**

**Enlightenment programs for adolescent girls on their general safety and wellness.**

**Conducting awareness-raising and sensitization in communities about GBV which includes sharing key messages through the media in accessible and appropriate formats.**

GBV response consists of interventions with explicit objectives to establish or strengthen service delivery which responds to the negative consequences of GBV after they have occurred. **GBV response aims to get life-saving care, information and support to GBV survivors so they can recover and regain control over their lives.**

GBV response services include medical, psychosocial and case management. **Response activities also seek to ensure more deliberate and systematic linkages between GBV and Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) for integrated, survivor-centred response efforts.**

**Examples of NHRC GBV response interventions include:**



**Securing Safe Spaces for Women and Girls which could be in form of shelter or securing a restraint order against an intimate violator.**



**Establishing and facilitating referral mechanisms to relevant GBV service provider.**



**Providing direct, or in partnership with local organizations, lifesaving services for clinical management of rape survivors; services include medical care, psychosocial support, case management, safety and legal aid and referrals for support services.**

1. GBV guidelines: <https://gbvguidelines.org/en>

2. World Bank. Gender-based Violence (Violence against women and girls) 2019. Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-sustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>



# Partnering With And Defending Women Rights Defenders

Civil society organisations and women rights defenders are key partners of NHRC. They are closer to the public and often have access to individuals the NHRC may not reach. NHRC engage with civil society by exchanging information, referring complaints, and collaborating on reports, training, and joint advocacy.

In addition, **NHRC also plays an important role in the protection of women human rights defenders, who may face gender-specific risks because of the type of rights they defend.**

## NHRC Roles and Responsibilities in Response To GBV

NHRC staff are specially trained to respond to GBV. The staff are trained to safely and ethically implement programs to address GBV.

NHRCs responsibility to survivors of GBV include the following:

- Recommend and implement survivor-centred GBV response and prevention services.
- Strengthen GBV referral pathways in coordination with relevant service providers.
- Disseminate information to/provide training to other service providers on the available referral pathways and intervention mechanisms.
- Support legal proceedings in cases of defilement or sexual assault, facilitating arrests and investigations, monitoring progress, and appearing in court as needed.
- Support other stakeholders to integrate GBV risk mitigation into programming.

## Survivor-Centred Approach

NHRC utilizes a survivor-centred approach. This means all GBV risk mitigation actions, response and prevention interventions must create a supportive environment in which survivors' rights and wishes are respected, their safety is ensured, and they are treated with dignity and respect. This is based on four GBV guiding principles for a survivor-centred approach which are:

### Safety:

The safety and security of survivors and their children are the primary considerations.

### Confidentiality:

Survivors have the right to choose to whom they will or will not tell their story, and any information about them should only be shared with their informed consent.

### Respect:

All actions taken should be guided by respect for the choices, wishes, rights and dignity of the survivor. The role of service providers is to facilitate recovery and provide resources to aid the survivor.

### Non-discrimination:

Survivors should receive equal and fair treatment regardless of their age, disability, gender identity, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or any other characteristic.

## NHRC GBV PROTECTION PATHWAYS

NHRCs duties as women's human rights defenders is not only to educate the general public on the rights of women but to also expose and denounce as human rights violations those practices and policies that silence and subordinate women. We reject specific legal, cultural or religious practices by which women are systematically discriminated against, excluded from political participation and public life, segregated in their daily lives, raped in ethnic/religious conflict situations, battered in their homes, sexually harassed in workplaces and schools, denied inheritance rights, forced to marry, assaulted for not conforming to gender norms and sold into forced labour or sexual slavery etc.

NHRC promotes unity of purpose for all stakeholders to unite in solidarity to end traditions, practices and laws that harm women. It is a call for freedom to be fully and completely human and equal without apology or permission. Ultimately, the struggle for women's human rights must be about making women's lives better everywhere all the time.

In practice, this means taking action to stop discrimination and violence against women and the promotion of women's rights.

We provide services to support women and children to live and thrive without abuse and free from all forms of violence. As an institution with a legal mandate to promote and protect human rights, ending SGBV is at the core of our priorities. We are committed to the principle of putting women and children at the centre of all that we do. NHRC embodies opposition to oppression and marginalization that women encounter in a complex and often punitive system like Nigeria. We are committed to women-centred, empowerment focused and trauma informed practice which will work toward reducing harm and supporting healing and self-determination for women and children.

## NHRC GBV RESPONSE POLICY

NHRC operates from the UN cardinal principle and method of approach to gender-based violence termed "Survivor-Centred Approach". The principle means recognizing and prioritising the rights, needs, and wishes of the person who has experienced gender-based violence.

NHRC survivor-centred approach objective is to create a supportive environment, ensure safety and dignity to promote a survivor's recovery, and reinforce the survivor's capacity to make decisions about possible interventions. Survivor centred approach is a comprehensive and individualised approach. It is a concept to work with survivors that strives to meet their individual needs, as they define and prioritise them. It ensures that survivors are treated with dignity and respect instead of being exposed to victim-blaming attitudes, have the opportunity of choosing the course of action in dealing with the violence instead of feeling powerless and respect for privacy and confidentiality instead of exposure.

## NHRC SGBV Response Procedure:

- A case of SGBV is reported over the telephone, email or a walk-in case.
- Medical attention is the first response if it has to do with sexual or physical violence. The survivor is immediately taken or referred to the nearest hospital or closest sexual assault referral centre, especially if the abused presents themselves within the first 72 hours of the incident.
- Referrals are made to the closest Police Family Support Unit so that investigation can commence, and liaison is established with the health facility and police station to ensure that proper documentation is done and the survivor is able to have access to medical provisions.
- Where necessary NHRC facilitates the arrest and investigation process to ensure that the case is charged to court or the suspect is remanded for a case of defilement or sexual assault
- Liaison is made with the Directorate of public prosecution in the ministry of justice to follow up on the process
- Where necessary, NHRC appears in court with the complainant to monitor the case either as watching brief for the survivor or as friend of the Court (amicus curie).

**“In the instance where a survivor needs other reliefs, like empowerment, shelter, or perhaps education if a child is affected, or child may need to be moved to another school, all these services are facilitated by NHRC. “**

## NHRC Initiatives/Mechanisms To Support Survivors Of SGBV

The NHRC established a Women and Children department as well as a Vulnerable Group department solely devoted to dealing with gender issues and children's rights. NHRC offices are open to complainants during the day, however cases of SGBV can occur at any time including in the night. The situation of the survivor may not also permit easy movement to get help or physically report to NHRC or any other CSO or service providing facility.

**“In order to improve access to survivors to report cases of SGBV and get faster assistance, the NHRC in collaboration with OSIWA and UN Spotlight Initiative of the UNDP and EU, has established an SGBV situation room with 24-hours call centre and toll-free numbers to facilitate confidential reporting of cases of SGBV. Survivors can call for assistance at any time – day or night.”**

## CEWHIN's APPROACH TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

CEWHIN's programmatic approach to GBV comprises of three major pillars –

### (i) Awareness Creation, (ii) Prevention, and (iii) Response

These approaches sometimes overlap and together comprise a consolidated approach to addressing GBV.

PILLARS	ACTIVITIES
<b>Awareness Creation</b> Information sharing and dissemination of knowledge geared towards change in societal outlook of gender and GBV issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Awareness campaigns within communities.</li><li>• Action-oriented research on SGBV.</li><li>• Production of knowledge materials.</li><li>• Awareness on importance of mental health and psychological support for survivors.</li></ul>
<b>Prevention</b> Interventions and/or activities aimed at stopping occurrences of GBV from happening at all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supporting women, including those with disabilities, in their safety, particularly regarding SGBV.</li><li>• Mobilizing communities, including religious and community leaders to change harmful social norms and in essence prevent GBV.</li></ul>
<b>Response</b> Mitigation Strategies/Interventions and/or activities to respond to GBV after occurrence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing direct or partnered psychosocial support, case management, and referrals.</li><li>• Strengthening the capacity of organizations and government agencies to respond to SGBV survivors.</li><li>• Training Psychological First Aiders for initial response and connecting survivors to mental health services.</li><li>• Establishing referral mechanisms and pathways to available support services.</li></ul>

# Referral Directory

## NHRC Headquarters

**Address:** No 19 Aguiyi Ironsi Street, Maitama | PMB 444, Garki, Abuja - Nigeria

**Phone Numbers:** 0800 647 2428 (Toll Free) , 09 290 3746, 09 290 8829, 0903 219 2577

**Website:** <https://www.nhrc.gov.ng>

**Mobile:** 6472 (SHORT CODE), 08006472428

**Email:** [info@nhrc.gov.ng](mailto:info@nhrc.gov.ng) | [nhrca@gmail.com](mailto:nhrca@gmail.com)

## NHRC | Lagos State Office

**Address:** No. 17 Balogun Street, Alausa, Ikeja, Lagos.

**Phone Numbers:** 0805 470 7559, 0808 158 1920

**Email:** [nhrclagos@nhrc.gov.ng](mailto:nhrclagos@nhrc.gov.ng) | [nhrcnigeriaswz@gmail.com](mailto:nhrcnigeriaswz@gmail.com)

## Centre for Women's Health and Information (CEWHIN)

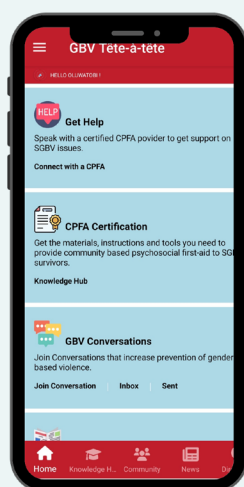
**Address:** 34, McNeil Road Sabo-Yaba, Lagos.

**Phone Numbers:** 0913 600 0347 or 0913 600 0349

**Email:** [info@cewhin.com](mailto:info@cewhin.com)

**Website:** [www.cewhin.com](http://www.cewhin.com)

## More Resources



### Download the GBV Tete-A-Tete App for Referral Assistance

Scan for iOS!



Scan for Android!



### Download our Abridged SOP for GBV Integrated Service Provision for Persons with Disabilities

This user-friendly guide empowers case actors & advocates to address violence against women and girls particularly persons with disabilities.

Scan





**CEWHIN**

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**Find Out More:**

**Centre for Women's Health and Information (CEWHIN)**

**[www.cewhin.com](http://www.cewhin.com)**

**[info@cewhin.com](mailto:info@cewhin.com) | 0913 600 0347 or 0913 600 0349**

This publication has been produced by the Centre for Women's Health and Information (CEWHIN). The purpose of this guidance note is to explain the human rights-based approach/response of the **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** to Gender Based Violence (GBV). CEWHIN hereby certifies that all the views expressed in this document are not necessarily the views of the United Nations or the European Union.