

Risk And Protective Factors Associated with Gender-Based Violence Among Fisherfolks in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed the risk and protective factors associated with gender-based violence (GBV) among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, it described the sociodemographic characteristics of fisherfolks, identified the types of GBV prevalent in the area, and assessed both risk and protective factors associated with GBV. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, using a combination of purposive and stratified sampling to select 216 participants from four Local Government Areas (LGAs) engaged in fishing activities. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires and interviews, and data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that 50% of the participants were male and 50% were female. The majority of respondents were married (57.8%), and about 33.9% had secondary education. Several types of GBV were identified, including verbal, physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence, with verbal abuse being the most commonly reported form. Risk factors such as economic instability, substance abuse, and patriarchal norms were found to exacerbate GBV, while protective factors like economic empowerment programs and legal frameworks helped mitigate violence. The study concluded that addressing the underlying socio-economic and cultural issues is critical to reducing GBV among fisherfolks in the region. Based on these findings, it was recommended that community-based economic empowerment and education programs be strengthened to reduce dependency and promote awareness of legal rights, particularly among women.

Key words: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Fisherfolks, Risk Factors, Protective Factors

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse. It stems from power imbalances, often upheld by patriarchal norms and cultural beliefs that perpetuate the subjugation of women. GBV is a critical violation of human rights and occurs across various societies, affecting women disproportionately (Ajanuwa et al., 2015; Adika et al., 2013). The United Nations defines GBV as any act likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, whether in public or private life (United Nations, 1993).

In fishing communities, particularly in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, GBV is a prevalent issue exacerbated by socio-economic challenges and traditional gender roles (Asanwana, 2015). Fisherfolks, who are primarily engaged in fishing and related activities, face unique vulnerabilities.

The interplay of poverty, isolation, and patriarchal structures reinforces gender inequalities, making women especially susceptible to domestic violence, economic deprivation, and emotional abuse (Oloko et al., 2022). Studies by Solomon (2021) and Tella et al. (2020) have highlighted the compounding effects of cultural norms, economic instability, and the lack of institutional support, which further increases the risks of GBV in rural areas.

Despite growing awareness, research specifically focusing on fisherfolk communities in Bayelsa remains limited, leaving significant gaps in understanding the unique risks and protective factors for these populations. In such communities, GBV often manifests in multiple forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, with women facing heightened vulnerability due to their socio-economic positions and isolation from protective institutions (Asa & Solomon, 2010; Asanwana et al., 2015). While some studies have identified economic pressure and lack of legal enforcement as exacerbating factors (Peek-Asa et al., 2011), there is limited exploration of risk and protective factors that could mitigate these issues. Hence, this study aims to fill this research gap.

The specific objectives of this research are to;

- i. describe the sociodemographic characteristics of fisherfolk in Bayelsa State, Nigeria
- ii. identify the common types of GBV among the respondents,
- iii. ascertain the risk factors associated with GBV among the respondents, and
- iv. ascertain the protective factors associated with GBV among the respondents.

2. Research Methodology

The study was conducted in rural areas of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, among fisherfolks who are predominantly engaged in fishing and related activities. The target population consisted of both men and women involved in fishing, processing, and marketing within the riverine communities. To ensure a representative sample, four Local Government Areas (LGAs) with significant fishing activities; Southern Ijaw, Nembe, Ogbia, and Sagbama, were randomly selected. Within each LGA, three communities were purposively chosen based on their engagement in fishing activities, yielding 12 communities in total. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of both male and female respondents.

Data collection involved both structured questionnaires and interviews to gather information on sociodemographic characteristics, types of gender-based violence (GBV), risk factors, and protective factors. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure clarity and reliability. In addition, key informants, including community leaders and heads of fishing associations, provided deeper insights into the social and cultural context of GBV. A total of 216 participants were selected for the study, comprising 192 focus group discussants and 24 key informants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, while factor analysis was employed to identify the risk and protective factors associated with GBV. Qualitative data, collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews, were analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes emerged around the types of GBV, as well as the risk factors and protective factors affecting its occurrence among fisherfolks in the communities.

This mixed-method approach ensured that the study captured both statistical trends through quantitative analysis and in-depth social insights through qualitative analysis. As a result, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of GBV among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Fisherfolks

The results presented in Table 1 provide significant insights into the sociodemographic characteristics of fisherfolks in rural areas of Bayelsa State, offering a deeper understanding of the population's composition, which may influence gender-based violence (GBV) risk and protective factors. The sex distribution shows an equal split between males and females, highlighting that both genders are equally represented in the study. This balance provides a unique opportunity to examine how gender interacts with the prevalence and types of GBV, aligning with findings from Asanwana et al. (2015) on the gendered nature of vulnerability in the Niger Delta region. It also underscores the importance of examining GBV as a phenomenon affecting both genders, albeit possibly in different ways.

The age distribution indicates that most fisherfolks fall within the 40-49 age range (23.4% of focus group participants and 25% of key informants), followed closely by those aged 50-59 and 30-39. The presence of older age groups (50 and above) suggests that a significant portion of the population may have deeply ingrained social norms that could either perpetuate or mitigate GBV, as highlighted by Solomon (2021), who discusses the persistence of cultural gender roles in rural Nigeria. The relatively low percentage of younger fisherfolks (< 30 years) implies that GBV interventions targeting younger generations must consider the influence of older community members who may hold decision-making power within households and the broader community (Ajanuwa et al., 2015).

Marital status also reveals interesting dynamics, with a majority being married (57.8% of focus group participants and 54.2% of key informants), followed by singles and widows. This high percentage of married individuals suggests a strong familial structure within these communities, which may contribute to particular forms of GBV, such as intimate partner violence (Tella et al., 2020). The presence of widows, who constitute a notable percentage, particularly among focus group participants (15.6%), could point to specific vulnerabilities, as widowhood in rural Nigeria often exposes women to economic insecurity and social isolation, heightening their risk of GBV (Solomon & Omotosho, 2004).

In terms of education, it is concerning that a significant portion of fisherfolks, particularly in the focus group (15.6%), have no formal education. Low educational attainment has been linked to increased vulnerability to GBV, as individuals with limited education may have reduced access to information about their rights or resources for seeking help (Adegbite, 2020). The fact that more key informants (41.7%) have secondary education compared to focus group participants suggests that educational attainment among community leaders or those in more influential positions may provide a protective factor. However, even among key informants, a considerable proportion (29.2%) only attained primary education, further reinforcing the need for GBV interventions that are accessible to individuals with varying literacy levels (Murphy et al., 2021).

Religiosity, as shown in the table, reveals that Christianity is the dominant religion, with 94.3% of focus group participants identifying as Christian. This homogeneity in religious affiliation could provide a platform for faith-based organizations to play a crucial role in GBV prevention and response. Religious leaders, often respected figures in rural communities, can influence societal attitudes toward GBV, either reinforcing harmful gender norms or advocating for change (Ogba-Amaugo & Isaac, 2024). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the relatively small Muslim population (5.7% and 4.2% in the focus group and key informants, respectively) should not be overlooked, as religious minority groups may face distinct challenges in addressing GBV (Koris et al., 2022).

The primary occupation data shows that fishing is the predominant occupation (56.8% of focus group participants), which is expected given the study's focus on fisherfolks. However, the presence of farming and trading as alternative livelihoods for a considerable number of participants (21.9% and 21.4%, respectively) indicates the multifaceted nature of economic activities in the region. As Asa & Solomon (2009) have shown, economic dependence on a single livelihood, particularly fishing, which is subject to seasonal and environmental fluctuations, can exacerbate financial stress within households, potentially leading to heightened GBV risks. Economic empowerment strategies that diversify income sources could serve as protective factors by reducing dependency and vulnerability.

Monthly income data further reveals economic disparities, with the majority of fisherfolks earning between ₦3,000 and ₦52,600 (69.3% of focus group participants). This income level suggests that many fisherfolks live in poverty, which has been associated with increased GBV risk (Ajagbe et al., 2020). Economic deprivation can fuel power imbalances within households, making women particularly vulnerable to violence (Peek-Asa et al., 2011). The small proportion of individuals earning higher incomes indicates that only a minority may have the economic resilience to escape abusive situations or challenge harmful gender norms (Adika et al., 2013).

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Fisherfolks (n=216)

Variables	Focus Group (n=192)	Discussants (n=24)
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	96	50.0
Female	96	50.0
Age (years)		
< 30	27	14.1
30-39	41	21.4
40-49	45	23.4
50-59	37	19.3
≥ 60	42	21.9
Marital Status		
Single	51	26.6
Married	111	57.8
Widowed	30	15.6
Education Level		
No Formal Education	30	15.6
Primary Education	63	32.8
Secondary Education	65	33.9
Tertiary Education	34	17.7
Religion		
Christianity	181	94.3
Islam	11	5.7
Primary Occupation		
Fishing	109	56.8
Farming	42	21.9

Trading	41	21.4	6	25.0
Monthly Income				
₦3,000 - ₦52,600	133	69.3	10	41.7
₦52,601 - ₦102,200	36	18.8	7	29.2
₦102,201 - ₦151,800	11	5.7	4	16.7
₦151,801 - ₦201,400	7	3.6	2	8.3
₦201,401 - ₦250,000	5	2.6	1	4.2

Source: Field survey (2024)

3.2. Types of Gender-Based Violence

The focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant in-depth interviews revealed the alarming and multifaceted nature of gender-based violence (GBV) among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State. Participants reported various forms of abuse, including verbal, physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence. These types of abuse highlight the widespread and systemic nature of GBV in the region, affecting both men and women, although the majority of victims were women.

Verbal Abuse emerged as a prominent form of GBV in the study area. Many participants shared their experiences of enduring harsh and demeaning words from their partners. As one female participant from Silga stated,

“He calls me worthless and useless every time he is angry. It’s like I am nothing to him.”

This highlights how verbal abuse, often normalized in the community, erodes self-esteem and inflicts psychological harm on the victims. Verbal abuse was also associated with control and intimidation, as another female participant from Nembe described,

“She constantly threatens to leave me and take the children away.”

The findings of this study correlate with research by Dalal (2011), which found that verbal abuse is a common but often overlooked form of GBV, particularly in rural settings, where cultural norms and economic stress exacerbate tensions within families.

In terms of physical abuse, both men and women reported being physically assaulted by their partners. For example, a female participant from Nembe recounted,

“He hits me whenever he is drunk. I have bruises all over my body.”

This aligns with the findings of Okenwa et al. (2009), which indicated that physical abuse is prevalent in rural areas of Nigeria, with alcohol consumption frequently exacerbating violent behavior. The fear of physical abuse permeated the participants' daily lives, creating an environment of constant anxiety and insecurity. Notably, male participants also reported experiencing physical violence, as one man from Silga mentioned,

“When my wife drinks, she becomes aggressive and hits me.”

This underscores the gender-neutral nature of GBV, although women remain disproportionately affected, as reported in studies by Owoaje & Olaolorun (2012).

Sexual abuse was another significant form of GBV identified in the study, with many female participants expressing feelings of powerlessness and violation. A female participant from Ogbia shared,

“He forces himself on me even when I say no. I feel violated in my own home.”

This statement reflects the pervasive issue of marital rape, a topic that is often stigmatized and underreported, as highlighted by Aihie (2009). The violation of bodily autonomy has profound psychological and emotional effects, contributing to a cycle of fear and helplessness among victims. The study's findings are consistent with research by Abrahams et al. (2014), which

showed that sexual violence within intimate relationships is prevalent in African societies, particularly where gender inequality and patriarchal norms are entrenched.

The economic abuse reported by participants also revealed the extent to which financial control is used as a tool of domination in abusive relationships. A female participant from Silga explained, *"He controls all the money and gives me just enough to buy food."*

Economic dependence on the abuser traps many victims in these relationships, as they lack the financial means to escape. This finding aligns with the study by Chika & Odimegwu (2017), which identified economic control as a significant risk factor for GBV in rural Nigeria. Economic abuse often coexisted with other forms of violence, compounding the overall harm experienced by the victims, a phenomenon also noted in research by Makama (2013).

Finally, emotional and psychological abuse was prevalent among participants, many of whom reported feeling isolated and humiliated by their partners. One female participant from Silga shared,

"He insults me in front of the children and neighbors. I feel so ashamed."

This form of abuse, while less visible, leaves deep emotional scars, as victims often suffer in silence. The study's findings support the conclusions of Aihie (2009), which indicated that emotional abuse is as damaging as physical abuse, contributing to long-term psychological trauma and depression. Emotional abuse often precedes physical violence, creating a pattern of escalating abuse, which mirrors the findings of Fawole (2008).

3.3. Risk Factors Associated with Gender-Based Violence

The factor analysis conducted on the risk factors associated with gender-based violence (GBV) among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State presented in Table 2 identified seven key components contributing to GBV. These factors, along with supporting statements from participants, reveal complex and interrelated influences that exacerbate violence within the community. The first factor identified is economic instability, which underscores the pervasive role of financial challenges in fostering violence. A participant from Ogbia emphasized,

"Poverty is a big reason why violence happens. When there is no money, men take out their frustration on their wives."

Economic hardship creates pressure within households, leading to frustration and, consequently, domestic violence. This finding aligns with the work of Asa and Solomon (2010), who highlighted the role of poverty in exacerbating household tensions in rural communities of Nigeria. Moreover, the market leader from Sagbama explained,

"Economic dependence on men makes it hard for women to leave abusive relationships,"

further reinforcing the link between financial dependence and vulnerability to violence.

The second factor, lack of education, also emerged as a critical risk factor. Participants expressed how limited educational opportunities contribute to the normalization of violence. A female participant from Silga stated,

"Lack of education makes people think it is normal to beat their wives."

This reflects the deeply entrenched belief systems that perpetuate violence, particularly in communities with lower educational attainment. The finding is consistent with Tella et al. (2020), who similarly identified a lack of education as a significant predictor of domestic violence in rural areas of the Niger Delta. However, as noted by a women group coordinator in Nembe,

"Even educated people sometimes abuse their spouses. Education alone is not enough; it's about changing mindsets and attitudes,"

highlighting that while education plays a role, it is not the sole solution.

The third factor, substance abuse, significantly exacerbates the risk of GBV. Alcohol and drug abuse were repeatedly mentioned as contributors to violent behavior. A female participant from Yenagoa remarked,

"Alcohol and drug abuse make men more aggressive,"

while a compound chief in Nembe emphasized the need for addressing substance abuse to reduce the incidence of violence. This finding corroborates the studies of Perrin et al. (2019), who identified substance abuse as a key risk factor in gender-based violence, particularly in low-resource settings like Bayelsa.

The fourth factor, cultural and traditional beliefs, revealed how patriarchal norms and harmful traditions perpetuate violence. A male participant from Ogbia shared,

"Cultural beliefs that men are superior to women encourage violence,"

highlighting the cultural endorsement of male dominance and control over women. These findings align with those of Solomon and Omotosho (2004), who noted similar patriarchal structures in other Nigerian communities, where gender power imbalances contribute to the marginalization and abuse of women. Additionally, forced marriages were cited as another cultural practice that fosters violence. A female participant from Silga remarked,

"Traditional practices like forced marriages contribute to violence. Women have no say and are treated like property,"

drawing attention to the need for cultural reforms to reduce GBV.

The fifth factor, peer pressure, especially among young men, was identified as a contributing factor. A male participant from Yenagoa noted,

"Peer pressure among young men leads to harassment and violence,"

indicating that violent behavior is often driven by the desire for validation and dominance within peer groups. This finding is consistent with the social norms discussed by Asa and Solomon (2009), who highlighted the role of peer influences in shaping behaviors in rural Nigerian communities.

The sixth factor, poor law enforcement, exacerbates GBV by enabling perpetrators to act with impunity. A male participant from Ogbia pointed out,

"The absence of strong legal action against offenders makes them bold,"

illustrating how ineffective law enforcement emboldens abusers and undermines efforts to protect victims. A women group coordinator in Nembe emphasized the need for "rigorous prosecution of offenders" to deter GBV, a sentiment echoed in the findings of Solomon (2021), who emphasized the importance of strong legal frameworks in addressing gender inequalities and violence.

Finally, the seventh factor identified is social isolation, which increases the vulnerability of individuals to GBV. The stigma associated with reporting violence and the lack of support systems contribute to the silencing of victims. A male participant from Ogbia highlighted the community's reluctance to intervene, stating,

"The community's silence and acceptance of violence make it worse."

This finding is consistent with the work of Oloko et al. (2022), who explored similar social dynamics among fisherfolk in other parts of Nigeria, where social isolation and stigma hinder efforts to address GBV.

Table 2: Component Correlation Matrix of Risk Factors Associated with Gender-Based Violence

Risk Factors	Fac. 1	Fac. 2	Fac. 3	Fac. 4	Fac. 5	Fac. 6	Fac. 7	Cum
Economic instability	0.789							0.758
Financial dependence	0.754							0.719
Lack of education	0.721							0.695
Substance abuse		0.831						0.812
Alcohol abuse		0.802						0.788
Peer pressure among men			0.755					0.734
Patriarchal norms			0.728					0.710
Cultural acceptance of violence			0.701					0.680
Forced marriages				0.768				0.744
Traditional practices				0.745				0.718
Absence of legal enforcement					0.816			0.799
Lack of legal consequences					0.784			0.765
Stigma associated with reporting						0.732		0.710
Social isolation						0.698		0.682
Gender roles in community							0.741	0.728
Male dominance in household decision-making							0.714	0.698
Economic empowerment opportunities								0.665
Peer influence on violent behavior								0.640
Awareness of legal rights								0.620
Access to education for women								0.601
Eigen Value	4.120	3.885	3.456	3.222	2.976	2.789	2.542	
Percentage (%) of Variation	20.6%	19.4%	17.3%	16.1%	14.9%	13.9%	12.7%	
Cumulative Percentage	20.6%	40.0%	57.3%	73.4%	88.3%	96.2%	100%	

Source: Field data (2024)

3.4. Protective Factors Associated with Gender-Based Violence

The factor analysis of protective factors associated with gender-based violence (GBV) presented in Table 3 identified seven major components. Each factor plays a crucial role in mitigating GBV among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State, supported by statements from respondents that offer deeper insights into the community's perspective on these protective mechanisms.

Economic empowerment emerged as a critical protective factor, as financial independence allows women to make independent decisions and escape abusive relationships. A female participant from Ogbia stated,

"When women have their own money, they are less likely to stay in abusive relationships. They can take care of themselves."

This highlights the role of financial stability in helping women resist and leave situations of abuse, as also emphasized by a market leader from Sagbama, who noted,

"Economic empowerment enables women to make decisive choices about their safety and well-being."

This finding aligns with Asa and Solomon (2010), who emphasize the importance of economic empowerment for rural women's autonomy in Nigeria, demonstrating consistency with prior research in similar socio-economic contexts.

Access to education was identified as another key protective factor. Educated women are more aware of their rights and less likely to tolerate abusive behavior. A female participant from Yenagoa remarked,

"Education helps women to know their rights and stand up for themselves. It makes them stronger."

This insight correlates with Solomon (2021), who underscores the transformative role of education in women's empowerment and capacity to challenge traditional gender norms. The alignment of this study's findings with Solomon's (2021) work emphasizes that education not only reduces vulnerability to GBV but also fosters resilience and self-advocacy among women.

Community support groups emerged as a third protective factor. Strong community networks, such as women's groups, offer both emotional and practical support to victims of GBV. A male participant from Silga mentioned,

"When the community supports victims, it gives them strength to speak out and seek help."

Similarly, a female participant from Sagbama added,

"Women's groups provide a safe space to share experiences and support each other."

This demonstrates how solidarity within communities helps women to cope with and combat violence, a notion supported by Perrin et al. (2019), who argue that collective action in gender-based violence prevention programs significantly reduce its prevalence.

Legal frameworks and their enforcement serve as a powerful deterrent against GBV, as respondents indicated. A male participant from Ogbia noted,

"Strict laws and enforcement against violence make men think twice before acting. They fear the consequences."

This protective factor stresses the need for robust legal systems to hold perpetrators accountable. Solomon and Omotosho (2004) similarly highlight the role of legal structures in altering gender power relations and reducing instances of violence. The consistency between this study's findings and Solomon and Omotosho's research underscores the importance of legal enforcement in addressing GBV.

Public awareness campaigns were also identified as crucial in raising awareness and encouraging communities to support victims of GBV. A female participant from Yenagoa emphasized,

"Public awareness campaigns help to educate people about the issues and encourage them to support victims."

The role of campaigns in changing public perception and challenging harmful norms is well-supported by Tella et al. (2020), who found that public education initiatives are key in shifting attitudes toward domestic violence in rural Niger Delta communities, further reinforcing the findings of this study.

Counseling and support services provide victims with necessary assistance and safe spaces. As a female participant from Ogbia noted,

"Having access to counseling and shelters gives victims a place to go and recover. It's essential for their safety."

This protective factor offers both immediate and long-term support to those affected by GBV. The provision of safe spaces and counseling reflects findings by Solomon (2012), who emphasized the need for institutional support systems for women in agricultural systems, showing congruence with this study's results.

Lastly, gender equality initiatives that include male allies as active participants emerged as a protective factor. A male participant from Silga explained,

"Men who stand against violence and support women set a good example for others."

This highlights the importance of involving men in promoting gender equality and non-violent behaviors, as their participation can foster a culture of respect and equality. This finding aligns with the work of Perrin et al. (2019), who argue that gender equality initiatives and male involvement are essential components of effective GBV prevention programs in low-resource settings, confirming the relevance of gender equality efforts in reducing violence.

Table 3: Component Correlation Matrix of Protective Factors Associated with Gender-Based Violence

Protective Factors	Fac. 1	Fac. 2	Fac. 3	Fac. 4	Fac. 5	Fac. 6	Fac. 7	Cum
Economic Empowerment Programmes	0.72							0.59
Access to Education	0.68							0.55
Educational Advocacy Initiatives	0.67							0.54
Educational Support for Victims	0.70							0.58
Community Support Groups		0.76						0.60
Public Awareness Campaigns		0.67						0.57
Strong Legal Frameworks and Enforcement			0.70					0.59
Legal Protection Programs			0.70					0.59
Community Legal Awareness			0.68					0.57
Awareness Campaigns				0.78				0.62
Advocacy for Victims' Rights				0.67				0.56
Counseling and Support Services					0.79			0.64
Violence Prevention Programs					0.67			0.56
Gender Equality Initiatives						0.77		0.62
Male Allies						0.71		0.57
Family and Social Networks							0.81	0.67
Crisis Intervention and Shelter Access							0.72	0.59
Secure Shelter Access							0.72	0.60
Family Counseling Services							0.78	0.62
Male Engagement in Prevention							0.71	0.60
Eigen Value	4.107	3.924	3.503	3.212	2.981	2.793	2.547	
Percentage (%) of Variation	20.5%	19.6%	17.5%	16.1%	14.9%	13.7%	12.7%	
Cumulative Percentage	20.5%	40.1%	57.6%	73.7%	88.6%	96.3%	100%	

Source: Field data (2024)

Conclusion

The study explored the risk and protective factors associated with gender-based violence (GBV) among fisherfolks in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that GBV in the region takes on many forms, including verbal, physical, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse. While women were disproportionately affected, the study also highlighted the gender-neutral nature of GBV, with men also reporting victimization. Key risk factors identified include economic instability, substance abuse, lack of education, patriarchal norms, peer pressure, poor law enforcement, and social isolation. These factors contribute to the normalization of violence in the community and hinder efforts to address GBV. On the other hand, economic empowerment, access to education, and strong community support systems emerged as protective factors that mitigate the risk of GBV and enable individuals to resist and escape abusive situations.

Recommendations

- i. **Address Economic Instability and Financial Dependence:** The study identified economic instability and financial dependence as major risk factors for gender-based violence (GBV). Therefore, community-based economic empowerment programs tailored for fisherfolks should be prioritized. These programs should focus on providing skills training, microloans, and financial literacy for both men and women to reduce household financial stress and dependency, which in turn may reduce GBV incidents. Empowering individuals with economic resources can alleviate the economic pressures that contribute to violence.
- ii. **Substance Abuse Prevention Initiatives:** Substance abuse, particularly alcohol and drug use, was highlighted as a significant risk factor for GBV. Preventive measures should include awareness campaigns focused on the harmful effects of substance abuse, alongside the establishment of rehabilitation programs within the community. Collaboration with local healthcare providers and NGOs could help implement these programs, thereby reducing the likelihood of GBV associated with substance abuse.
- iii. **Education and Cultural Reforms:** The study found that lack of education and deeply ingrained patriarchal norms are critical contributors to GBV. Thus, implementing educational programs that promote gender equality, legal rights, and the harmful effects of violence is essential. These should be combined with cultural reform initiatives aimed at challenging traditional gender roles and reducing the societal acceptance of violence. This approach could include engaging community leaders and elders in dialogues to shift cultural beliefs that perpetuate GBV.
- iv. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Law Enforcement:** Weak law enforcement and the absence of legal consequences were identified as risk factors that perpetuate GBV. To address this, it is crucial to strengthen the local legal frameworks by enforcing stricter penalties for perpetrators and ensuring that law enforcement agencies are trained to handle GBV cases effectively. Additionally, creating clear, confidential reporting mechanisms will encourage victims to come forward without fear of retribution.
- v. **Enhance Community Support Networks:** Social isolation was another factor that increased vulnerability to GBV. Strengthening community support networks, such as women's groups and peer support systems, can provide victims with the emotional and practical assistance needed to seek help and escape abusive situations. Establishing safe spaces and helplines where individuals can access counseling and other services will also play a critical role in mitigating the effects of social isolation.

- vi. **Expand Public Awareness and Advocacy Campaigns:** Public awareness campaigns that focus on raising awareness about GBV and promoting gender equality were identified as protective factors. Expanding these campaigns to reach more remote fishing communities, and ensuring they are culturally appropriate, can help reduce the normalization of violence and foster community support for victims. Advocacy for victims' rights, along with widespread education, will contribute to changing harmful attitudes toward GBV.

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