

Mitigating Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Rural Communities: Challenges and Way Forward

Mercy Edejehwro , Aitokhuehi Osagie Joseph , Ernest Imongan , Jones Abriku , Iroroturi Iyamba

Centre For Population And Environmental Development, Nigeria

Abstract

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is a pressing global issue that severely hampers socioeconomic progress and deepens gender inequities, with women and girls in rural communities disproportionately impacted. This study synthesizes qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews conducted in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria to explore the prevalence, forms and causes of SGBV, as well as barriers women and girls face in seeking help after experiences of violence, as well as potential solutions. Key findings indicate that intimate partner violence, sexual assault by acquaintances and strangers, and other forms of gender-based violence are common. Social norms, such as the belief that men are superior to women and minimal penalties for perpetrators, contribute to the normalization of violence. Many women are reluctant to report abuse to authorities due to fear of stigma, blame and the perception that law enforcement will not act. To mitigate these challenges, the study recommends multifaceted approaches including challenging harmful gender norms through community education and engagement; strengthening law enforcement's capacity to respond appropriately to reports of violence; providing comprehensive support services for survivors; and amplifying the voices of women leaders to drive change. This will enhance the wellbeing of women and girls in rural settings.

Keywords: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Rural Communities, Social Norms