

Prevalence, Forms, and Predictors of Gender-Based Violence among Undergraduate Female Social Studies Students in Federal Universities, Plateau State, Nigeria

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Received: 25/05/2026 | Accepted: 08/07/2026 | Published: 27/07/2026

Abstract: Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive but under-documented threat to the educational experience of female undergraduate students in Nigerian universities, yet little empirical evidence exists on its prevalence, dominant forms, and predictors among Social Studies education students specifically. This study assessed the prevalence rate, predominant forms, and socio-cultural, institutional, and individual predictors of GBV among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, anchored on Feminist Theory and Social Learning Theory. The population comprised 1,160 undergraduate female Social Studies students across the University of Jos and the Federal University of Education, Pankshin, from which a sample of 297 was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure (purposive, proportionate stratified, and simple random sampling), with the sample size determined via the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected using a validated researcher-developed instrument, titled “Gender-Based Violence Prevalence, Forms, and Predictors Questionnaire” (GBVPFPQ), and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and regression analysis to test three null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Results indicated a high overall prevalence of gender-based violence among respondents (grand mean = 2.73, SD = 1.02), with 63.3% reporting personal experience of GBV within the university environment. Psychological/emotional abuse was the most predominant form ($M = 3.21$), followed by sexual harassment ($M = 3.04$) and physical abuse ($M = 2.61$). Weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies was the most significant predictor ($M = 3.05$), followed by patriarchal socio-cultural norms ($M = 2.88$). All three null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance ($p < .05$). The study concludes that GBV constitutes a measurable and identifiable risk factor within the university environment for this population, with implications for institutional policy, counselling provision, and gender-responsive campus safety planning. Recommendations are offered for university administrators, policymakers, counselling units, and advocacy stakeholders.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, Plateau State, Nigeria, Prevalence, Social Studies education, Undergraduate female students.

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is increasingly recognized as one of the most pervasive and least confronted threats to women's safety, dignity, and full participation in public life, including higher education (World Bank Group, 2019; Odebode, 2025). It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harms rooted in unequal power relations and systemic discrimination against women and girls (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2019; National Human Rights Commission [NHRC], 2022). University campuses, often assumed to be safe and intellectually liberating spaces, are not exempt from this pattern: harassment and coercion by lecturers or peers, intimate partner violence, and forms of violence carried over from

home and community settings continue to shape the everyday experiences of female undergraduates (Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development [CJID], 2022; Ojo, Daniel & Adeniyi, 2023). In Nigeria, national-level data illustrate the scale of the problem. The National Bureau of Statistics (2019) reported that approximately 30% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence, while more recent monitoring recorded well over a hundred gender-related killings of women in a single year (News Central Africa, 2024). Plateau State, the geographic focus of this study, has been specifically identified as a context where entrenched socio-cultural and institutional factors reinforce harmful gender norms, compounding the vulnerability of female students both on and off campus (NBS, 2021; NHRC, 2022).

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Despite this backdrop, empirical research that quantifies the prevalence, documents the predominant forms, and statistically tests the predictors of gender-based violence among a clearly defined university population in Plateau State remains scarce. Much of the existing literature on gender-based violence in Nigerian and broader African tertiary institutions suffers from methodological limitations: small or poorly justified sample sizes, unvalidated instruments, absent or unreported reliability coefficients, and a tendency to describe prevalence without statistically testing the factors that predict it (Dawit, 2019; Kgolane, 2023; Mtasingwa & Mwaipopo, 2022). Few studies, moreover, have focused specifically on Social Studies education students, a population whose curriculum directly engages with topics of human relationships, social justice, and societal conflict, and for whom gender-based violence exposure may carry distinct relevance. This study addresses these gaps by providing a methodologically rigorous, statistically tested account of gender-based violence prevalence, forms, and predictors among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State, Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite growing concern about gender-based violence in Nigerian universities, there is still limited empirically grounded evidence on its prevalence, forms, and predictors among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State. Existing studies show that GBV remains common among female students, with prevalence estimates ranging from 58.8% to 70% in Nigerian higher-education settings, and with emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual violence appearing consistently across findings (Okechukwu & Iloka 2025). However, these studies are not specific to female Social Studies students in Plateau State, meaning that the scale of exposure, the dominant forms of violence, and the factors that predict victimization in this academic group remain insufficiently documented.

This evidence gap limits the ability of university administrators and policymakers to design targeted prevention, reporting, and support systems based on local data. Without statistically validated information on prevalence and predictors, interventions may fail to address the institutional, socio-cultural, and individual factors that shape women students' vulnerability. This study therefore investigates the prevalence rate, predominant forms, and predictors of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State, Nigeria.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Assess the prevalence rate of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students.

2. Assess the predominant forms of gender-based violence experienced within the university environment.

3. Assess the socio-cultural, institutional, and individual factors associated with gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence rate of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students?

2. What are the predominant forms of gender-based violence experienced within the university environment by undergraduate female Social Studies students?

3. What socio-cultural, institutional, and individual factors are associated with gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant prevalence of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students.

H₀₂: There is no single predominant form of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between identified socio-cultural, institutional, and individual factors and the occurrence of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is broadly understood as any act that inflicts physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm on a person because of their gender, rooted in unequal power relations and systemic discrimination (Odebode, 2025). The World Health Organization (2018) frames GBV as violence arising from unequal power relations between men and women, in which women are disproportionately victimized through intimidation, coercion, and deprivation of liberty. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 2017) similarly defines it as violence directed at a person based on sex, encompassing threats, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. While both men and women can experience GBV, women and girls remain its primary victims globally (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024; United Nations, 2019), and within universities, this manifests through harassment, intimidation, and coercion by lecturers, peers, and intimate partners (CJID, 2022).

2.1.2 Forms of Gender-Based Violence in Tertiary Institutions

Gender-based violence in higher education manifests in multiple, often overlapping forms. Physical abuse in the form of hitting, slapping, and other bodily harm was reported by approximately 28% of female university students nationally (NBS, 2021), with documented links to anxiety, depression, and reduced academic concentration (Eze & Nwankwo, 2022). Sexual abuse and harassment, ranging from unwanted verbal advances to rape, remains one of the most pervasive forms; studies report prevalence figures as high as 48.2% for sexual harassment among Southwestern Nigerian undergraduates (Onuegbunam, Nwaeze & Ikenna, 2023) and 73.6% among South-East Nigerian state university students (Obande-Ogbuinya, 2022). Psychological/emotional abuse like insults, intimidation and manipulation is frequently the most commonly reported form, with prevalence rates between 50% and 70% across Nigerian studies (Ojo, Daniel & Adeniyi, 2023; Udam, Ukoaka & Udoh, 2024). Economic/financial abuse, often manifesting as transactional “sex-for-grades” or “sex-for-money” dynamics, disproportionately affects financially vulnerable students (Aliyu, Mohammed, Bello & Omeiza, 2023; UNESCO, 2019). Additional forms documented in the Nigerian context include digital abuse (cyberstalking, non-consensual image sharing), neglect abuse (institutional failure to act on complaints), spiritual abuse, and harmful traditional practices such as early/forced marriage and female genital mutilation (UNFPA, 2022; Ileyemi, 2025).

2.1.3 Predictors and Causes of Gender-Based Violence

The literature identifies GBV as multi-causal, arising from the interaction of socio-cultural, institutional, economic, and individual factors rather than any single source. Socio-cultural factors include patriarchal norms that normalize male dominance, religious teachings that reinforce female submission, and ethnic cultural practices conferring proprietary rights over women (Ezelote, Azusu, Ebere & Chukwu, 2021; Bakare, 2019). Institutional and legal weaknesses such as inconsistent enforcement of the VAPP Act (2015), poorly resourced reporting structures, and police reluctance to act create conditions of impunity (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2021; Owoaje & Olaolorun, 2019). Economic factors, including poverty, financial dependency, and inadequate hostel accommodation force students into unsafe off-campus housing, heightening vulnerability (Akor & Adekeye, 2022; Onwuama, Ibut, Agbo & Obiwulu, 2021). Individual-level factors include substance use, which impairs judgment and is statistically associated with both perpetration and victimization (Oseni, 2022), and unsupervised digital/social media engagement, which has emerged as a growing enabler of technology-facilitated violence (FAWE, 2021).

2.2 Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Nigerian Higher Education

Empirical evidence consistently documents high gender-based violence prevalence across Nigerian tertiary institutions, though figures vary by methodology, region, and form measured. National Bureau of Statistics (2019) data place the overall prevalence among women aged 15-49 at approximately 30%. Within university populations specifically, reported rates range considerably: 58.8% overall prevalence in a Kano study (with 22.8% physical, 22.2% sexual, and 50.8% emotional violence); 89.1% in a Kwara State study; and 61.9% physical, 56.4% psychological, and 25.3% sexual abuse in an Abuja-based study (Ojo, Daniel & Adeniyi, 2023). This variance reflects differences in instrumentation, sampling, and operational definitions across studies, a methodological inconsistency that this study's validated instrument is designed to address.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Feminist Theory (Wollstonecraft, 1792) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Feminist Theory explains gender-based violence as a product of structural gender inequality and patriarchal power imbalance rather than isolated individual misconduct, providing a lens for understanding why female students are disproportionately vulnerable within university hierarchies. Social Learning Theory complements this by explaining how violent and discriminatory behaviour is acquired and perpetuated through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within families, peer groups, and institutions, accounting for the intergenerational and institutional persistence of gender-based violence even where formal sanctions exist.

3. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to assess the prevalence, predominant forms, and predictors of gender-based violence among 297 undergraduate female Social Studies students drawn from the two federal universities in Plateau State, Nigeria (total population: 1,160), with the sample size determined via the Taro Yamane formula and respondents selected through multi-stage sampling combining purposive, stratified, proportional, and simple random techniques. The multi-stage sampling procedure involved four distinct stages: purposive, stratified, proportional, and simple random sampling. Each stage served a specific function in ensuring that the final sample was both representative of the target population and feasible to access within the scope of the study.

At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select the two federal universities in Plateau State, which are the University of Jos and the Federal University of Education, Pankshin, as these are the only federal universities in the state that offer Social Studies as a discipline within their

Faculties/Departments of Education. Purposive sampling was therefore necessary at this stage because the population of interest (undergraduate female Social Studies students) is confined to institutions offering the specific academic programme under study.

At the second stage, stratified sampling was employed to divide the population of female Social Studies students in each university into strata based on academic year level (100, 200, 300, and 400 levels). This ensured that students at all stages of the program were adequately represented in the sample, rather than the sample being skewed toward any particular level.

At the third stage, proportional allocation was applied to determine how many participants would be drawn from each stratum (year level) in each university, based on the relative size of that stratum within the total population. This ensured that levels with larger student populations contributed proportionally more participants to the sample than levels with smaller populations.

At the fourth and final stage, simple random sampling, using the lottery/balloting technique, was used to select individual participants from each stratum. This ensured that every eligible student within a given stratum had an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias at the level of individual participants.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were eligible for inclusion in the study if they: 1. Were female undergraduate students 2. Were officially registered/enrolled in the Social Studies education programme at the University of Jos or the Federal University of Education, Pankshin 3. Were in 100, 200, 300, or 400 level at the time of data collection 4. Gave informed consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study if they: 1. Were male students, since the study specifically examined female students' attitudes and academic achievement 2. Were enrolled in departments/programmes other than Social Studies education 3. Were on academic leave, suspension, or deferred enrollment at the time of data collection 4. Declined to give informed consent 5. Submitted incomplete or invalid questionnaires.

Data were collected using the researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Gender-Based Violence Prevalence, Forms, and Predictors Questionnaire (GBVPFPQ)" a four-point Likert-scale instrument whose content validity was established by three experts (CVI = 1.00) and whose reliability was determined via Cronbach's alpha from a pilot study of 30 students at Federal University Lafia. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaire using the face-to-face method. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard

deviation against a benchmark of 17.50 (derived from the scale midpoint of 2.50 multiplied by the seven items in each scale), which was used as the criterion score and inferential statistics (linear regression analysis at $p \leq 0.05$) via SPSS version 25.0.4. Results

3.1 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of gender-based violence research, this study adhered strictly to established ethical principles for research involving human participants, particularly those addressing vulnerable populations and sensitive topics.

Informed Consent

Before questionnaire administration, all participants were given a written informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the nature of the questions to be asked, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or consequence to their academic standing. Participants were required to indicate their consent by signing (or ticking, for anonymous administration) the consent section before proceeding to the main questionnaire. No participant was compelled or coerced to participate.

Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Privacy

To protect participants given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the following measures were adopted:

1. **Anonymity:** Participants were instructed not to write their names, matriculation numbers, or any other personally identifying information on the questionnaire. Each questionnaire was assigned a numerical code for data tracking purposes only, with no link maintained between codes and individual identities.
2. **Confidentiality:** All completed questionnaires were kept in a secure location accessible only to the researcher and trained research assistants bound by a confidentiality agreement. Data extracted from the questionnaires were stored electronically in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.
3. **Privacy during administration:** Questionnaires were administered in private settings (lecture hall) which allowed participants to complete the instrument without being observed by peers, lecturers, or other students. Research assistants were trained to remain at a respectful distance during administration and were not permitted to view individual responses.
4. **Data reporting:** Findings were reported only in aggregate/statistical form; no individual responses or identifying details were presented in the study, ensuring that no participant could be identified from the reported results.

Institutional Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Jos Research Ethics Committee before the commencement of data collection. Permission was also obtained from the management of the University of Jos and the Federal University of Education, Pankshin, to conduct the study among their undergraduate Social Studies students.

Participant Protection Procedures

In recognition of the potentially distressing nature of GBV-related questions, the following additional protective measures were implemented:

1. Research assistants were trained to recognize signs of distress among participants and to respond appropriately and sensitively.
2. Participants who appeared distressed or requested support during or after questionnaire completion were provided with information on available support services, including the university's counseling unit/health center and relevant GBV response contacts.
3. Participants were informed that they could skip any question they did not wish to answer and could discontinue participation at any time without justification.
4. No incentives were offered that could be considered coercive given the sensitive nature of the topic.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 297)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institution	University of Jos	147	49.5
	Federal University of Education, Pankshin	150	50.5
Level of Study	100 Level	67	22.6
	200 Level	65	21.9
	300 Level	74	24.9
	400 Level	91	30.6
Age	16–20 years	89	30.0
	21–25 years	152	51.2
	26 years and above	56	18.9
Marital Status	Single	261	87.9
	Married	36	12.1

Source: Field Survey (2026).

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents (50.5%) were drawn from the Federal University of Education, Pankshin, aged between 21 and 25 years (51.2%), and

predominantly single (87.9%). This distribution reflects the typical demographic composition of undergraduate Social Studies students in the study area.

4.2 Research Question 1: Prevalence Rate of Gender-Based Violence

Table 2: Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence Among Respondents

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	M	SD	Decision
I have personally experienced GBV within my university environment	28.6	34.7	22.2	14.5	2.77	1.02	High
I know a close friend/classmate who has experienced GBV	41.1	38.4	13.1	7.4	3.13	0.91	High
I have felt unsafe on campus due to fear of GBV	32.0	30.6	21.9	15.5	2.79	1.08	High
I have experienced GBV more than once	19.5	27.9	31.0	21.5	2.45	1.04	Low
I have witnessed an incident of GBV on campus	35.4	33.0	19.5	12.1	2.92	1.01	High
I avoid certain areas on campus due to past GBV experience	30.6	29.0	24.2	16.2	2.74	1.07	High
I have reported or considered reporting a GBV incident	18.2	22.6	33.7	25.6	2.33	1.03	Low
Grand Mean					2.73		High Prevalence

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. Decision rule: $M \geq 2.50$ (benchmark) = High; $M < 2.50$ = Low.

Table 2 reveals a grand mean of 2.73 ($SD = 1.02$), which is above the benchmark mean of 2.50, indicating a high prevalence of gender-based violence among undergraduate female Social Studies students in the study area. Specifically, 63.3% of respondents reported personally

experiencing GBV, while 79.5% reported knowing someone who had. This establishes that the substantial majority of the sample reported direct or indirect exposure to at least one form of GBV within their university environment.

4.3 Research Question 2: Predominant Forms of Gender-Based Violence

Table 3: Mean Ranking of Forms of Gender-Based Violence Experienced

Form of GBV	M	SD	Rank	Decision
Psychological/Emotional abuse (insults, intimidation, humiliation)	3.21	0.88	1st	High
Sexual harassment (verbal/non-verbal unwanted advances)	3.04	0.95	2nd	High
Physical abuse (hitting, pushing, assault)	2.61	1.02	3rd	High
Economic/financial abuse (sex-for-grades, sex-for-money)	2.55	0.99	4th	High
Digital/online abuse (cyberstalking, image-sharing, harassment)	2.38	1.05	5th	Low
Neglect/institutional abuse (ignored complaints, denied support)	2.20	0.97	6th	Low
Harmful traditional practices (early marriage pressure, FGM-related)	1.84	0.91	7th	Low

Decision rule: $M \geq 2.50$ = High occurrence; $M < 2.50$ = Low occurrence.

As presented in Table 3, psychological/emotional abuse emerged as the most predominant form of gender-based violence experienced by respondents ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.88$, Rank 1st), followed by sexual harassment ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.95$, Rank 2nd) and physical abuse ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.02$,

Rank 3rd). Harmful traditional practices were the least prevalent ($M = 1.84$, Rank 7th). This finding suggests that subtler, less visible forms of abuse are more pervasive within this population than overt physical violence.

4.4 Research Question 3: Socio-Cultural, Institutional, and Individual Predictors of GBV

Table 4: Mean Ranking of Predictors of Gender-Based Violence

Predictor Factor	M	SD	Rank	Decision
Weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies	3.05	0.93	1st	High
Patriarchal/socio-cultural norms tolerating male dominance	2.88	0.96	2nd	High
Financial dependence/economic vulnerability of students	2.76	1.00	3rd	High
Inadequate campus security and lighting	2.69	0.98	4th	High
Power imbalance between lecturers and students	2.62	1.04	5th	High
Substance use/abuse in social settings	2.41	1.06	6th	Low
Unsafe off-campus housing arrangements	2.34	0.99	7th	Low

Decision rule: $M \geq 2.50$ = a significant predictor factor; $M < 2.50$ = less significant.

Table 4 shows that weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies was identified by respondents as the most significant predictor of GBV occurrence ($M = 3.05$, Rank 1st), followed by patriarchal/socio-cultural norms tolerating male dominance ($M = 2.88$, Rank 2nd). This aligns with the

literature reviewed in Section 2.1.3, which similarly identified institutional and legal weaknesses, alongside patriarchal cultural norms, as dominant predictors of GBV in comparable Nigerian settings (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2021; Bakare, 2019).

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

Table 5: Summary of Regression Analysis for Hypotheses 1–3

Hyp.	Predictor → Outcome	β	R^2	F	df	p	Decision
H ₀₁	Demographic/exposure factors → GBV prevalence	0.42	0.176	12.84	(1,295)	0.000	Rejected
H ₀₂	Form-specific indicators → predominant form classification	0.38	0.144	10.21	(1,295)	0.001	Rejected
H ₀₃	Socio-cultural/institutional/individual factors → GBV occurrence	0.51	0.260	18.37	(3,293)	0.000	Rejected

As shown in Table 5, the regression result for H₀₁ yielded a calculated p-value of .000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, indicating that there is a significant prevalence of GBV among undergraduate female Social Studies students. Similarly, H₀₂ ($p = .001$) and H₀₃ ($p = .000$) were both rejected, confirming a single predominant form of GBV and a significant relationship between socio-cultural, institutional, and individual factors and the occurrence of GBV, respectively.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1 Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence

The findings of this study revealed that gender-based violence is highly prevalent among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State, with 63.3% of respondents reporting direct exposure to at least one form of GBV. This finding is broadly consistent with the work of Obande-Ogbuinya (2022), who

reported a 73.6% prevalence of sexual harassment among South-East Nigerian state university students, and Owusu-Antwi (2024), whose nine-university Sub-Saharan African survey found psychological violence prevalence as high as 64.9%. The prevalence rate established here lends empirical weight to NBS (2021) projections that approximately 28% of female university students nationally report experiences of physical violence, suggesting that the situation in Plateau State mirrors or exceeds the national pattern.

This finding can be interpreted through the lens of Feminist Theory (Wollstonecraft, 1792), which frames such pervasive exposure not as isolated misconduct but as a structural symptom of unequal power relations within the university environment that largely expose female students to harassment, intimidation, and coercion regardless of their individual choices or behavior. The persistence of high prevalence despite existing legal frameworks such as the VAPP Act (2015) further underscores the gap between policy and lived experience that this study's literature review identified as a recurring theme across the reviewed empirical studies.

5.2 Predominant Forms of Gender-Based Violence

The result for Research Question 2 showed that psychological/emotional abuse was the most predominant form of GBV experienced by respondents ($M = 3.21$), followed by sexual harassment ($M = 3.04$) and physical abuse ($M = 2.61$), while harmful traditional practices were the least commonly reported ($M = 1.84$). This finding aligns with Ojo, Daniel and Adeniyi (2023), who similarly found psychological abuse (56.4%) to be a highly prevalent form alongside physical abuse (61.9%) among Abuja tertiary students, and with Udam, Ukoaka and Udoh (2024), who identified emotional violence as the single most common form (18.6%) among University of Calabar undergraduates. The strong ranking of sexual harassment is also consistent with Onuegbunam, Nwaeze and Ikenna (2023), who found that 48.2% of Nigerian university students reported at least one form of sexual harassment, with sexually offensive jokes (44.7%) and nonconsensual touching (27.8%) as common manifestations.

The comparatively lower ranking of digital/online abuse in this sample ($M = 2.38$) is notable given that Ileyemi (2025) documented over 6,000 GBV cases nationally within a five months period in 2024, many involving technology-facilitated violence, suggesting that this form may be underreported due to limited digital literacy among respondents, or that further qualitative investigation may be warranted to understand underreporting dynamics specific to this population. That psychological and sexual forms of GBV outrank more overtly physical forms is theoretically consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): subtler forms of abuse such as insults, intimidation, unwanted verbal advances are more easily normalized, observed, and imitated within peer and institutional

hierarchies precisely because they are less visible and less likely to trigger formal sanction, allowing them to persist and replicate across the student population.

5.3 Predictors of Gender-Based Violence

Regarding Research Question 3, weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies emerged as the most significant factor associated with GBV occurrence ($M = 3.05$), followed by patriarchal/socio-cultural norms tolerating male dominance ($M = 2.88$) and financial dependence/economic vulnerability ($M = 2.76$). This finding corroborates Adebayo and Kolawole (2021) and Owoaje and Olaolorun (2019), who identified weak enforcement mechanisms, poorly resourced police units, and inconsistent application of the VAPP Act as central enablers of impunity around GBV in Nigerian institutional settings. The strong second-place ranking of patriarchal norms also supports Bakare (2019) and Ezelote, Azusu, Ebere and Chukwu (2021), who argued that entrenched patriarchal cultural practices across Nigeria's major ethnic groups continue to subordinate women's status and normalize tolerance of gender-based harm.

The comparatively lower ranking of unsafe off-campus housing arrangements ($M = 2.34$, Rank 7th) suggests that, within this specific population of Social Studies students in Plateau State, housing-related vulnerability, while still statistically significant, plays a more secondary role relative to structural and institutional drivers such as weak policy enforcement and entrenched cultural norms. Generally, these results support Hypothesis 3, confirming that GBV occurrence among this population is not attributable to any single cause but to the interaction of socio-cultural, institutional, and individual-level factors which is consistent with the multi-causal framing established in Section 2.1.3 of this study's literature review.

5.4 Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The findings affirm that gender-based violence constitutes a measurable, identifiable, and theoretically explicable risk within the university environment for this population. The high prevalence rate (63.3%), the dominance of psychological and sexual forms, and the centrality of institutional and socio-cultural predictors jointly suggest that interventions targeting institutional policy enforcement rather than individual behavior change alone are likely to yield the greatest reduction in GBV exposure for this population.

These findings also extend the existing literature in two respects. First, by employing a validated instrument with an explicit benchmark scoring system (rather than the largely descriptive, unvalidated approaches identified as a recurring limitation in Section 2.4 of the literature review), this study offers a more methodologically defensible prevalence estimate specific to Social Studies education students, a population not previously isolated in existing

Nigerian GBV research. Second, the regression-based hypothesis testing employed here moves beyond the purely descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) that characterized the majority of reviewed studies, allowing for statistically grounded claims about predictor significance rather than mere association.

5.5 Limitations

As with most cross-sectional self-report studies on sensitive topics, this study's findings are subject to potential social desirability bias and underreporting, particularly given the stigma historically associated with GBV disclosure in Nigerian institutional contexts (Saini, 2021; Owoaje & Olaolorun, 2019). The study's scope was limited to female Social Studies students in two federal universities in Plateau State, which also constrains generalizability to male students, other academic disciplines, or state/private universities. Future research employing longitudinal or mixed-methods designs may further illuminate the causal direction and lived texture of these relationships.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to assess the prevalence rate, predominant forms, and predictors of gender-based violence (GBV) among undergraduate female Social Studies students in federal universities in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that GBV is highly prevalent within this population, with 63.3% of respondents reporting direct or indirect exposure to one or more forms of violence within their university environment. Psychological/emotional abuse emerged as the most predominant form of GBV experienced, ahead of sexual harassment and physical abuse, while weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies was identified as the most significant predictor of its occurrence. All three null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, confirming that GBV exposure among this population is statistically significant and shaped by an interaction of socio-cultural, institutional, and individual-level factors rather than any single cause.

These findings affirm that gender-based violence is not a peripheral or incidental concern within Nigerian higher education but a measurable, identifiable, and theoretically explicable feature of the university environment for female undergraduates in Social Studies education. Viewed through Feminist Theory, the persistence of gender-based violence at this scale reflects entrenched structural power imbalances rather than isolated individual misconduct; viewed through Social Learning Theory, its persistence reflects the ease with which subtler, less visible forms of abuse are normalized, observed, and reproduced within institutional and peer hierarchies. Generally, the study contributes a methodologically rigorous, statistically tested empirical baseline, one that has been largely absent for this specific population and reinforces the urgency of moving

institutional responses beyond policy documents toward consistent, enforced, and adequately resourced practice.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Institutions should strengthen the enforcement of existing anti-GBV policies, including the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015) and institution-specific sexual harassment guidelines by establishing or resourcing dedicated reporting units with clear, confidential, and survivor-centered complaint procedures, rather than relying on policy documents that exist on paper but are inconsistently applied.
2. Given that psychological/emotional abuse emerged as the most prevalent form of GBV in this population, counselling services should be specifically resourced and trained to identify, respond to, and provide trauma-informed support for this particular form of violence, rather than offering only generic counselling provision.
3. Evidence from this study should inform the development or revision of state-level policy directed at tertiary institutions in Plateau State, with particular attention to addressing weak enforcement of institutional anti-GBV policies, which this study identified as the most significant driver of GBV occurrence among the sampled population.
4. Collaborative awareness and prevention campaigns should be intensified within federal universities in Plateau State, using this study's prevalence and predictor findings to design targeted, evidence-based interventions rather than generic sensitization programmes.
5. Given the role of power imbalance between staff and students as a contributing factor identified in the literature and explored in this study's findings, departments should institute mandatory periodic training on professional conduct boundaries and mechanisms for safely reporting colleague misconduct.
6. This study was limited to female undergraduates in Social Studies education across two federal universities in Plateau State. Future research should extend this inquiry to male students, other academic disciplines, state and private universities, and should consider longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to capture the lived, qualitative texture of GBV experiences alongside quantitative prevalence data. Researchers are also encouraged to examine the relationship between the GBV prevalence and predictor patterns established here and downstream outcomes such as attitude and academic achievement, the focus of a companion study by the present author.

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