Echoes of Survivors: A Narrative of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Chikun and Kajuru Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, Nigeria

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SUMMARY

The issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) perpetrated against women and girls is a matter of utmost gravity that necessitates immediate attention and the implementation of timely and effective remedies. The present qualitative study delved into Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) within the context of banditry conflicts occurring in Kaduna State, Nigeria's Chikun and Kajuru Local Government Areas (LGAs). By employing a combination of focus groups, interviews, and the innovative method of drama-song creation, an in-depth exploration was conducted to delve into the experiences of women and girl survivors. This investigation was carried out within the intricate framework of localized communal tensions, aiming to understand their unique perspectives and narratives comprehensively. The research findings unveiled the widespread occurrence of various manifestations of sexual violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, which armed groups perpetrated.

The survivors have articulated the experience of facing significant social stigma and rejection from their families and communities in the aftermath of the violence, thereby intensifying the existing trauma. The presence of patriarchal gender norms, which uphold traditional male dominance, along with discriminatory practices that limit female autonomy and their exclusion from decision-making processes, have been identified as factors that contribute to the creation of an environment conducive to elevated levels of sexual predation and the subsequent re-victimization of individuals. The findings demonstrate the intricate interplay between gender inequality and conflict, which collectively influence the vulnerabilities of women and girls to experiencing violence. To effectively support survivors and tackle the underlying issues, it is recommended that certain measures be taken. These measures encompass the following: enhancing the representation and influence of women in governance structures, offering specialized psychosocial support services, fostering a shift in detrimental attitudes, providing security forces with training in trauma-informed care, advocating for gender equality, and directing assistance towards sustainable livelihood initiatives. This study offers original perspectives from marginalized women within a context that has received limited attention. It further emphasizes the gendered nature of sexual violence associated with conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION:

Background to the study

This study focuses on women and girls and how they experience sexual violence in conflict. The study is located within the broader term of Conflict Related-Sexual Violence (CRSV) and premised within the context of banditry in the Chikun and Kajuru Local Government Areas of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Kaduna State is one of the states in the northwest region of Nigeria where the banditry crisis is prevalent. Banditry in Nigeria is a conflict between the government and diverse violent groups, and this ongoing conflict is referred to as banditry by government officials (Ojewale, 2021).

Banditry in Northwest Nigeria has been a complex issue for quite a long time. Economic hardship, political corruption, and porous borders leading to the proliferation of small arms have been attributed as the cause of the banditry crisis (Osasona, 2022). It is essential to state that in Kaduna state, issues such as unaddressed communal misunderstandings and ethnoreligious intolerance, among others, have caused pockets of violent attacks and reprisals over time, suspected to have evolved into present-day banditry characterized by the rise of criminal gangs engaging in killing, cattle rustling, kidnapping, village arson, community eviction and other forms of violence. Sadly, intertwined with the conflict are all forms of sexual violence targeted at women and girls, especially in kidnappings and abductions while being held captive.

Background to the research problem

Between 2013 and 2022, the trend of attacks by armed bandits in the Northwest region shows that out of 909 incidents of attacks, Kaduna experienced 342. Relative to other states in the region, Kaduna experienced more attacks by armed bandits within this period (NST data set, 2022). In light of these assaults, women are at greater risk when kidnapped, as they might face other forms of violations because they are women. Women kidnapped are raped, assaulted, and violated in various ways, inflicting physical harm and leaving deep emotional scars. They are sometimes subjected to commercial exploitation and used as trade-offs. This is especially so when families face dilemmas wherein they are compelled to exchange their daughters for protection (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022).

Statement of the problem

There is mounting evidence of rape and kidnapping of young women and girls for use as sex slaves or as subjects of forced marriage during bandit attacks on communities (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2021, UN SG-SC, 2021). According to the report of the U.N. panel on CRSV, 210 cases of CRSV were documented in 2020 (UN SG-SC, 2021). Of utmost concern is that most of the abducted women who suffer these atrocities have little support from their communities after returning home traumatized (Ojo et al., 2023). The rate of sexual violence, which was already high, has risen even further amidst the banditry conflicts. However, there is an absence of data on the dimension of CRSV and the complexities that interplay to influence the experiences of individual women and girls' survivors within the study area.

Country overview
Nigeria is located in West Africa, sharing a border with Benin, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and the Gulf of Guinea (Internet Geography, 2023). The country has tropical rainforests in the south, Sahel savannah in the north, and Atlantic Ocean coastal plains. It has over 200 million people (Worldometer, 2023), making it the most populous country in Africa. According to United Nations, Nigeria might be the 3rd most populous country in the world, projecting that its population will reach 411 million by 2050. Nigeria is currently experiencing its most extended period of civilian rule since independence. It is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse country with over 500 ethnic groups, each with its language and traditions. The official language is English, which was inherited from the colonial era. Nigeria is known for its vast oil reserves, which have been a major source of revenue. However, the country faces poverty, corruption, and insecurity. Despite these challenges, Nigeria has a vibrant economy which is home to several thriving industries, including agriculture, telecommunications, and entertainment. The country is also known for its rich cultural heritage, which is reflected in its music, art, and literature
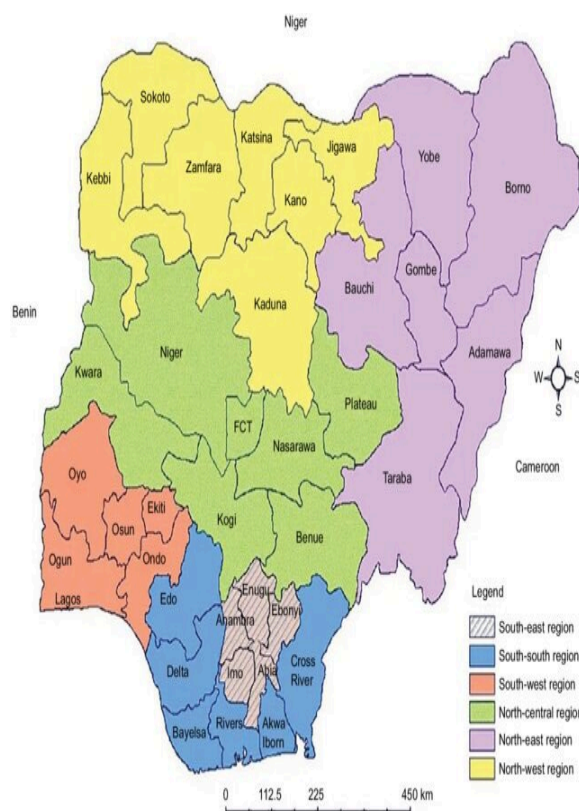
Figure 2: Map of Nigeria

Source: ResearchGate.net

Figure 1: Nigeria's profile

Presentation of Research Commissioner

Human Rights Monitor Kaduna is this research project's problem owner and commissioner. The research falls within the focus area of Human Rights Monitor and, in line with its vision, of a society where the rule of law is upheld and the Rights of the citizens are guaranteed by due process. Human Rights Monitor is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-partisan human rights organisation founded in Kaduna in 1992 during the military era amidst the struggle for democracy and the rule of law. It was legally registered in 2002. It is the first established non-governmental human rights organisation in Northern Nigeria, working proactively for democracy, good governance, peace, equality, and justice by protecting and promoting human rights.

Through this study, Human Rights Monitor seeks to develop targeted interventions that meet the specific needs of the survivors to address this grave human rights issue.

Research Objective

The research aims to gain insights into the experiences of survivors of CRSV given the banditry in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria, and proffer recommendations that will empower

Human Rights Monitor to develop an informed intervention that safeguards the rights of survivors in the area.

Main research question

How do different factors interplay to influence the experiences of survivors of CRSV within the banditry crisis in the Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the forms of sexual violence experienced by women in Chikun and Kajuru LGA in the banditry crisis?
2. What are the factors influencing the experiences of survivors in Chikun and Kajuru LGA?
3. What are the gender norms and practices enabling the occurrence of sexual violence in the conflict in Chikun and Kajuru LGA?
4. What are the consequences of conflict-related sexual violence in Chikun and Kajuru LGA?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The conceptual framework for understanding violence against women and girls (VAWG) in conflict, gender inequality, and economic crisis developed by Ellsberg et al. is adopted to guide this study. From now on, it is referred to as "The Framework" throughout this text. The framework uncovers three contexts within which violence against women and girls occurs, including the conflict that triggers sexual violence in the context of CRSV, gender inequality, and economic crisis. The framework postulates that the dynamic interaction within the three contexts overlaps to increase the risk of threats that women and girls face. (Ellsberg et al., 2021). These contexts are distinct but overlap to determine a dimension of risk for violence against women and girls in the context of conflict, and the relationship and overlapping nature influence the experiences of women and girls. (Ellsberg et al., 2021). The interaction between these contexts will vary in different settings because of the dynamic nature of people, societies, customs and traditions, and real-life situations.

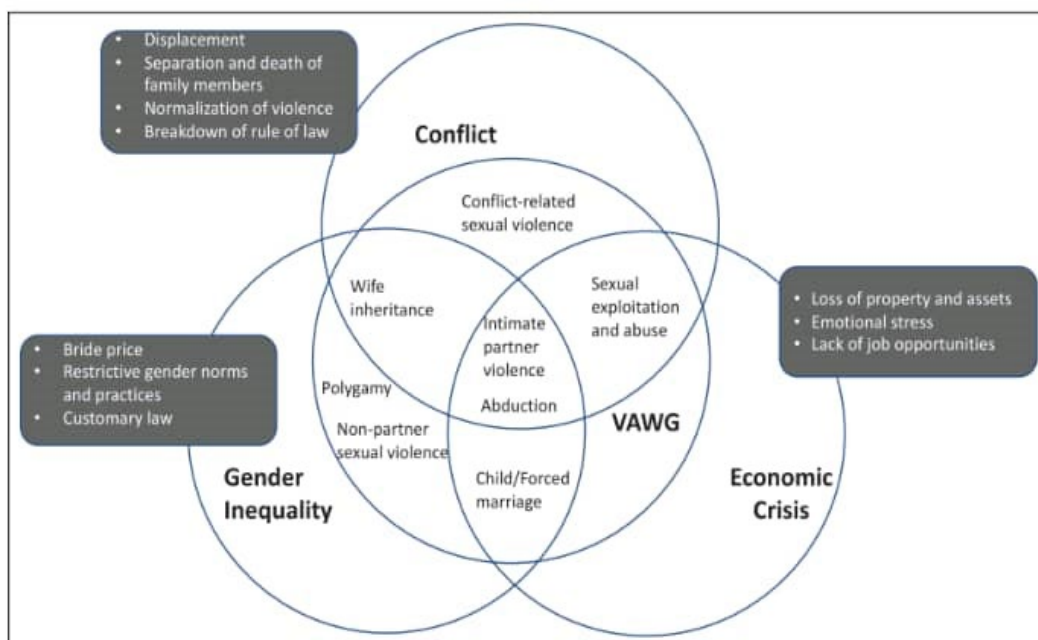*Figure 3: Conceptual Framework for understanding Violence Against Women & Girls Empowerment*

Source: Ellsberg et al., 2021

Definition of Terms

Conflict related-sexual violence:

According to the U.N. Secretary-General,

> *The term "conflict-related sexual violence" refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, and any other form*

of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. That link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, which includes terrorist entities; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a political, ethnic or religious minority group or targeted based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse, cross-border consequences such as displacement or trafficking, and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for sexual violence or exploitation when committed in situations of conflict. (U.N.,2022)

Scholarly papers have defined CRSV in a variety of ways, implying that the concept is not viewed linearly. In Colombia, civil society organisations see CRSV as a result of patriarchal structures rather than a weapon of war (Kreft 2020). According to Hagen, CRSV perpetrated by men and women challenges gendered assumptions about femininity and masculinity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and how power operates through acts of sexual violence (Hagen 2019). Patriarchal norms and practises validate sexual violence in society, but they also isolate, stigmatise, and eventually silence victims (Kreft 2022). According to Rufanova, CRSV is still a systematic, widespread, pervasive, and universal phenomenon that directly threatens global peace and human security (Rufanova, 2022). Overall, the papers suggest that CRSV is a complex issue that cannot be defined or explained in a single way.

Banditry:

According to Collins Advanced Learners' Dictionary, Banditry refers to acts of robbery and violence in areas where the rule of law has broken down. It is an organised crime involving violence, extortion, robbery, and murder, committed by outlaws who are often banned or outlawed by the authorities (Osasona 2022; Banditry – Wikipedia 2011). Banditry can severely threaten social order and security and the government's legitimacy. Bandits can also evolve into rebels or join larger rebel movements. The government can use various methods to suppress banditry, such as execution, display of severed heads, special censors, bribery, or incorporation of bandits into the regime. (Soyinka 1997)

CRSV Survivor:

Sexual survivor in conflict refers to an individual who has experienced sexual violence during a war, armed conflict, or other violent situations and has managed to survive (Steiner et al., 2009)**. For the purpose of this study, survivor is referred to as women and girls through out the text.**

A Conceptualisation of Conflict-Related-Sexual Violence within the VAWG Framework

CRSV is a type of SGBV that stems from armed conflict, a human rights violation rooted in gender inequality and discrimination. Schulz and Kreft (2022). It is one of the most pervasive and entrenched impediments to gender equality and women's empowerment (Kreft, 2023). Social norms and power imbalances rooted in inequalities, such as gender inequality, underpin CRSV (Kreft, 2023). The harmful impacts of CRSV experienced by survivors, their families, and communities, including the barriers survivors face to recovery, undermine poverty reduction, gender equality, conflict prevention and resolution, and fuel conflict. (Shepherd, 2016) Due mainly to historical patterns of gender inequality and discrimination, women and girls continue to be the groups most affected by CRSV. (Ellsberg et al., 2021)

Forms of Sexual Violence in the context of Conflict

Conflict-related sexual violence takes many horrific forms, including rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, sexual torture, and genital mutilation (Nordås and Cohen, 2021). State militaries and rebel groups perpetrate these acts during war, though state militaries are more frequently reported as perpetrators (Cohen and Nordås, 2014). While sexual violence occurs in many conflicts, it is not ubiquitous, with some armed groups choosing not to deploy it (Wood, 2006).

The prevalence of sexual violence varies widely between conflicts, ranging from 4.3% to 74.3% in the studies examined (Ba, 2017). In some conflicts, certain groups are targeted, such as ethnic or religious minorities or those with certain sexual orientations or gender identities (Bynander, 2016). Violence can emerge in any conflict, whether interstate wars, civil wars, or more minor localized conflicts (Russell, 2012).

CRSV in the context of Gender Inequality

These papers identify several factors that enable conflict-related sexual violence, and a significant factor identified is patriarchal gender norms that normalize violence against women. Niggeler (2021) and Kreft (2022) find that conflict-related sexual violence in the DRC is rooted in patriarchal conceptions of masculinity that see violence as an acceptable way to release frustration and exert power, and in the Colombian context, activists view conflict-related sexual violence as arising from patriarchal structures, not just strategic war aims (Kreft 2021). Similarly, more studies show that patriarchal norms assert the dominance of men over women in all areas of life. They promote strict gender roles where women are subordinate to men, who are aggressive and dominant. These norms justify and normalize the abuse and control of women. In conflict, armed groups weaponize these norms to terrorize populations. They use sexual violence to humiliate and emasculate enemy men by "conquering" their women. (Solangon, et al. 2012; Lugova, et al. 2020).

Furthermore, studies also suggest that unequal power dynamics established in patriarchal gender norms are the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence. Guarnieri (2023) found that armed groups with more male-dominant gender norms are likelier to perpetrate sexual violence, especially against groups with less male-dominant norms. Kreft (2022) argues that patriarchal norms normalize sexual violence in society and stigmatize victims, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. Victims of sexual violence are further disadvantaged because of unequal power dynamics, which reinforce traditional barriers to healthcare and justice, leaving victims of CRSV with little recourse. (Lugova, 2020). In different parts of the world, survivors of sexual violence, be it in conflict or not, are often subjected to double victimisation wherein in addition to their ordeal, they further face stigmatisation from their communities and discrimination by the criminal justice system due to limiting policies, negative laws and procedures related to the prosecution and administration of justice in rape cases. (Maphosa 2021; Franklin et al, 2019) When sexual violence is caused by a conflict, communities and institutions react in many different ways. Patriarchal norms and practises normalise sexual violence in society, shame and silence its victims, and make it harder to get justice (Guarnieri 2023). At the family reunion, male relatives of people who have been sexually abused may reject or accept their wives based on things like fear of getting STDs, social stigma, and financial burden (Kelly 2017). It has also been said that ethnic gender norms affect the strategic use of sexual violence for military purposes and the expressive use of sexual violence for personal reasons in ethnic civil conflicts worldwide (Kreft 2022). Josse (2010) talked about the psychological and community-level effects of sexual violence. These effects include changes in self-image and relationships, social stigma, and how people in the community relate to each other. Literature also shows what it was like for survivors and how hard it was for them to get justice and medical care. Howard's report from 2022 talks about how hard it is for people who have been sexually abused during a war to get medical care and how hard it is for children born because of this abuse to get justice (Baines 2021).

In summary, the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence are the broader patriarchal structures and unequal gender dynamics within societies. Armed conflict only amplifies these harms by giving perpetrators more power over victims and less accountability. To address this issue, interventions must confront the underlying gender norms and power imbalances that make this violence possible. (Kreft, 2022; Kreft, 2020; Lugova, 2020). By empowering women and marginalized groups, prosecuting perpetrators, and providing trauma-informed services for victims, we can work to dismantle the systems that enable such grave human rights violations.

The intersection between CRSV and IPV

There is a clear link between conflict-related sexual violence and intimate partner violence, according to these papers. Svallfors (2020) found that exposure to armed conflict in Colombia was associated with an increased risk of women experiencing emotional, physical, and sexual violence from their partners. Gray (2022) also found that refugees in Uganda perceived causal connections between sexual violence by enemy armed groups and subsequent intimate partner violence. Østby (2016) analyzed data from 17 African countries and found that the intensity of armed conflict was independently associated with an increased risk of women experiencing intimate partner sexual violence.

Some papers examined the mechanisms behind this link. Guarnieri (2023) found that armed groups with more male-dominant gender norms were more likely to perpetrate sexual violence and that sexual violence was more likely when there was a more significant "cultural distance" between the gender norms of the perpetrator and victim groups. Drumond (2016) argues that the link can be seen in the profiles of perpetrators and victims, the climate of impunity in conflict settings, and cross-border effects like displacement and trafficking. Jewkes (2002) argues that the link exists because violence is used to resolve conflicts and crises of male identity, and norms of violence are more socially accepted in conflict settings. However, the evidence on interventions to break this link is limited. (Hossain et al., 2020) reviewed studies on interventions like empowerment, social norms change, and survivor support in conflict settings. They found limited evidence that some economic empowerment, social norms, and survivor interventions may reduce risks or incidence of intimate partner violence and sexual violence.

In summary, there is clear evidence that conflict-related sexual violence and intimate partner violence are linked through shared risk factors, social norms, perpetrator motivations, and other mechanisms, according to these papers. However, more research is still needed on effective interventions to prevent and reduce these forms of violence, especially in conflict and crisis settings.

Interconnecting factors enabling CRSV

While patriarchal norms create the conditions for sexual violence, armed groups may use it strategically to demoralize opponents, destroy communities, and assert control (Bynander 2016). However, local activists argue that strategic aims alone do not explain sexual violence, which arises more from patriarchal norms (Kreft 2020). Impunity and lack of consequences also enable sexual violence. Kreft (2022) argues that patriarchal norms lead to stigmatizing and silencing victims, allowing perpetrators to act without consequences. Niggeler (2021) finds that FARDC soldiers in DRC use sexual violence for "personal catharsis" partly because they lack other coping mechanisms and face few consequences. Strategic war aims can also motivate sexual violence. Other factors include militarization and lack of rule of law (Jewkes 2007), forced migration and displacement (Bynander 2016), and the spread of disease (Jewkes 2007). Comparison of different contexts also shapes knowledge about sexual violence (Read 2019).

These papers show that conflict-related sexual violence arises from the interconnection of patriarchal gender norms, impunity, strategic war aims, and social upheaval. Patriarchal norms that normalize violence against women are a primary enabling factor, though armed groups may strategically deploy sexual violence for military ends. Tackling conflict-related sexual violence requires addressing all these interconnected factors.

Structured violence against women and girls is common in Nigeria, but it is especially bad in the northern part of the country. Even though Boko Haram's abuse of women and girls is more evident than the daily discrimination they face, the insurgents' abuse of women is just an extension of the neglect and abuse women have been subjected to for decades. (Inman, 2018) Boko Haram's various acts of violence against women result from numerous causes. One of these is their emphasis on the compelled imposition of Sharia through rigid gendered ideological structures (Pearson 2014). The ideology of Sharia is one of the possible factors upon which gender-based violence has relied. (Alamu 2022).

In addition, the culture of Nigeria and Africa does not place a high value on the female gender, and women are exploited as such (Alamu 2022). The leaders of Boko Haram have adopted gendered norms that oppose the rights and privileges of women associated with Western ideas. (Ojo 2020) This has led to the group's violent attacks on schools and communities, mainly targeting young girls who seek education. The abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014 brought international attention to Boko Haram's campaign against women's education and empowerment (Carter 2016). Matfess explains in her book how the discriminatory practises, sexism, and systemic violence that women in Nigeria experience make it impossible to determine if some behaviours are forced, chosen, or only a means of survival (Matfess, 2017). Women are viewed as instruments of violent negotiation between warring parties. In the Boko Haram situation, women from both sides of the government (innocent citizens) and wives and relatives of the insurgents were abducted or arrested, detained, raped, and violated as a means of mounting pressure, as revenge, or as a way of making a point. (Pearson 2014) 'It is a case of the grass suffering when two elephants fight." (African proverb, meaning that the weak get hurt in conflicts between the powerful).

Consequences of CRSV on Survivors

The consequences of conflict-related sexual violence are devastating and long-lasting. Survivors frequently experience physical problems like HIV/AIDS, other STDs, and injuries (Ba, 2017). They also commonly develop mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Ba, 2017). Socially, they often face rejection from their communities and families and economic insecurity (Ba, 2017). While knowledge about effective responses and interventions is limited, providing survivors with medical care and mental health support is critical (García-Moreno, 2014). Preventing sexual violence in conflict requires understanding its patterns and holding perpetrators accountable (García-Moreno, 2014). Overall, conflict-related sexual violence is a pervasive issue that causes immense suffering, violates human rights, and threatens security (Wood, 2014), though it is not an inevitable result of war, and more can be done to curb it (García-Moreno, 2014).

Gender inequality and conflict-related sexual violence have devastating effects on women and girls. They experience high rates of violence caused by and made worse by interconnecting factors. Women and girls bear a particularly brutal burden of violence that causes severe physical and psychological wounds. Urgent measures are needed to improve support for victims, shift harmful gender norms, and end violence against women. At the core of the U.N. peacekeeping mandate is the pro-active drive toward preventing conflict-related sexual violence against the initially accepted notion of CRSV as an inevitable by-product of conflict that only requires reactionary efforts. The present shift brings to the fore that CRSV is an expression of gender inequality linked to armed conflict. Prevention must include normative change as well as power imbalances. Long-standing approaches that combat gender inequality and violence against women are critical. (U.N., 2022)

III.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology

This section outlines the research design and data collection methods employed to investigate the experiences and norms surrounding conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Chikun and Kajuru Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kaduna State, Nigeria. This study employed a multi-method approach to capture the communal perspectives and individual experiences of women and girls from various age groups.

Qualitative data were collected from three communities: Kasuwan Magani in Kajuru LGA and Kakau and Maraban Rido in Chikun LGA. All these communities have been affected by banditry. Fifty-three (53) individuals participated in the study through focus group discussions (FGDs), individual interviews, and drama songs.

Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

FGDs were carried out with women from the communities who have either been kidnapped or have experienced attacks on their homes or communities. The FGDs utilized participatory tools designed to encourage candid discussion among participants.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) utilized participatory techniques, including group sharing and collaborative storytelling. Rather than directly answering the moderator's questions, participants were encouraged to interact and share stories about their experiences. The women compared accounts, asked each other questions, and even offered reassurance during emotional moments. This collaborative storytelling approach enabled women to guide the discussion based on what they found most salient. The interactive dynamic elicited richer qualitative data than direct questioning would have. In addition, group sharing of personal stories fostered a supportive environment where women could speak candidly about sensitive issues. The participatory FGDs produced insightful qualitative data rooted in the participants' priorities and frameworks.

Four FGDs were conducted to collect data:

Older Women Group (30-60 years, married or unmarried): This group was targeted to capture the experiences and perspectives of older women, who might find it awkward to discuss sensitive topics in the presence of younger women.

Younger Women Group (17-29, married or unmarried): This group was targeted to encourage free expression among younger women without the presence of older women, who could potentially inhibit

their openness. Initially, the younger group was also supposed to keep journals to provide additional perspectives that might not be captured in FGDs or interviews. However, this method was dropped as the participants lacked writing skills, limiting the study to FGDs, interviews, and drama-song creation.

Drama-Song Creation with "Zumunta Mata"

For the older women group, the research engaged with an existing women's group called "Zumunta Mata." This method involved creating drama-song related to the research questions, participating in rehearsals, and observing conversations. This method was adopted to encourage expression in a culturally sensitive manner. The drama song was carried out in Maraban Rido in Chikun LGA, capturing women's experiences in a more expressive form. The drama-song workshop provided an interactive, arts-based approach to data collection. The participatory process involved extensive collaboration as participants helped craft a dramatic sketch and song lyrics reflecting the research issues over multiple workshops. This simulation of women's experiences through drama songs catalyzed the expression of sensitive accounts and elicited data in an accessible, culturally resonant form. The active involvement of participants in shaping the creative output centered their perspectives and enabled a depth of qualitative data. The rehearsal interactions also revealed additional insights into norms and power relations. The drama-song creation generated highly contextualized, emotionally compelling data through participatory techniques that fostered empowerment and solidarity.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with female survivors willing to participate in the study. Two survivors were identified through the Sexual and Assault Referral Centre, also known as the Salama Centre, while three other survivors were accessed directly through their communities with the help of prior contacts and based on the insights gained from the FGDs, one (1) selected participant from the FGD who is a survivor was invited for a one-to-one interview to delve deeper into individual experiences and perspectives.

Language of research

All interviews and FGDs were conducted in the Hausa language, the most widely spoken language in the communities. However, language barriers were encountered with some respondents who had a limited understanding of Hausa but were more comfortable in their local dialect.

Data Analysis

Recorded interviews and FGDs were translated and transcribed into English. Manual coding was used to identify emerging themes and patterns, which were then reviewed in light of the research questions and existing literature. Triangulation between different sites and age groups was employed to identify common or differing views among participants.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was verbally obtained from all participants before the collection of data. Additionally, options for counselling support were also offered.

Fieldwork Challenges and Adaptations

At the initial design stage, my proposed study site was Chikun LGA, but I soon discovered through the Sexual Assault Referral Centre that more women had experienced sexual violence in Kajuru LGA, Kajuru LGA is a neighboring LGA and shares boundaries with Chikun LGA. I adapted my study site to include Kajuru, and Kajuru LGA has suffered more security challenges with relative peace at present but also heightened safety concerns. As a result of this development, I expanded my FGDs from 2 to 4 to accommodate perspectives from this region. Furthermore, in executing the drama song, I had to be present and be involved with every aspect until the final product. It was challenging to travel there for rehearsals multiple times as shooting the drama songs took 9 nine practices and meetings. I also had to immerse myself and collaboratively build trust. It was time-consuming yet fulfilling to participate in the process and the song itself. I dedicated resources to appreciate participants' time and involvement in the study. It was a one-off for the FGDs and interviews, but for the drama song, I had to make available refreshments and transport logistics for each day of rehearsal. The women were more than willing to have their voices out there without any of these arrangements, but it was only proper for me to do so.

Accessing the Research Community: Conducting fieldwork in a bandit attack-prone community presented unique and significant challenges. Accessing the community was full of risks and uncertainties due to the unpredictable security situation. Safety guidelines were provided by local contacts in advance, advising against actions such as using personal vehicles or chartering entire cars, as these might attract unwanted attention. Dress codes were also suggested to blend in with the community rather than stand out.

On-the-Ground Experience

The anticipated challenges became real upon arrival, adding layers of sophistication to the research process. The team had to navigate through potentially unsafe areas, including crossing a river via a relatively secure route. The journey to the community was a mix of fear, owing to the inherent dangers, and excitement, fueled by a commitment to the research and the potential for positive community impact.

Emotional Impact on the Researcher

Listening to the distressing stories of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the given context was not just a procedural exercise but an emotional experience that triggered tears and empathy. This emotional toll highlights the ethical responsibility and emotional labor involved in qualitative research on sensitive topics. It serves as a reminder that behind every data point is a human experience laced with complexities.

The methodology was designed to be adaptive and culturally sensitive to effectively capture the nuanced experiences and views of the participants regarding CRSV. While the study faced limitations in terms of the data collection methods initially planned, it still succeeded in employing a multi-method approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

IV.   FINDINGS

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the key findings derived from my research concerning the encounters of women impacted by conflict-induced sexual violence in Chikun and Kajuru Local Government Areas (LGAs). Several prominent themes were identified through a qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with a sample of participants. The themes provide insight into the diverse manifestations of violence, the factors that shape survivors' experiences with violence, and the gender/cultural norms that sustain its perpetuation. The results are ordered and presented in line with the research sub-questions accordingly.

Note: In reporting, participants are used when referring to FGD respondents, while survivors are used when referring to individual respondents who have suffered sexual violence. Participants were drawn from 3 locations within Kajuru and Chikun LGAs: Kakau and Maraban Rido communities in Chikun and Kasuwan Magani in Kajuru. The participants from the Maraban Rido community are members of the drama song group, and their data was delivered as a drama song. The link to the performance of the drama song is included at the end of this chapter. Participants from the FGDs constitute women in the age category of 30-60, all married or unmarried, and another age category of 17-28, all unmarried. The FGD participants from Kasuwan Magani in Kajuru LGA in the 30-60 age group have all been abducted at some point, and other FGDs had a mix of those who have been abducted and others who haven't.

The 6 Survivors interviewed did not fall into the FGD age grouping; some are married, others are not. For the purpose of reporting the result, fictitious names are assigned with a brief description of each survivor:

Laraba from Kakau community in Chikun LGA:

Age: 36

Marital Status: Married to a pastor.

Occupation: Housewife

Incident: Experienced a traumatic incident at the age of 34.

Larai from Kasuwan Magani community in Kajuru LGA:

Age: 26

Marital Status: Unmarried

Occupation: Trader

Incident: Faced a traumatic incident at the age of 24.

Ladidi from Kasuwan Magani community in Kajuru LGA:

Age: 24

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Farmer

Incident: Encountered a traumatic incident at the age of 22.

Jumai from Kasuwan Magani community in Kajuru LGA:

Age: 26

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Sells bean cakes

Incident: Went through a traumatic incident at the age of 25.

Asabe from Kasuwan Magani community in Kajuru LGA:

Age: 20

Marital Status: Divorced after a 10-year marriage

Occupation: Farmer

Incident: Experienced a traumatic incident at the age of 19.

Talatu from Kakau community in Chikun LGA:

Age: 22

Marital Status: Unmarried

Occupation: Student

Incident: Faced a traumatic incident at the age of 19.

Results

Theme 1: Forms of Sexual Violence:

This theme delves into the disturbing experiences of sexual assault and violence and the influence of bandits' activities on sexual violence. The predominant forms of sexual violence described by participants include rape and gang rape by bandits which were emphasized as the most pervasive acts, with women providing detailed accounts of being raped at gunpoint during kidnappings or raids on their villages. Beyond rape, other forms of sexual violence include forced marriage, nudity, pregnancy, abortion, and sexual assault. The accounts reveal both one-time incidents of sexual violence and repeated victimization over longer periods while held captive. The violence is delivered through outright force and coercion tied to threats against loved ones.

For instance, both the FGD Participants and Survivors provided harrowing accounts of the types of sexual violence they have experienced or witnessed. In her report, Talatu, a survivor from the Kakau community in Chikun LGA, narrated;

" When the Fulani men attacked our community, they shot guns, beat us up, and rounded us up at one spot. Before they took us away, three (3) of the men took me to my aunt's room together with my aunt and put a gun to our heads, and asked me to undress, my aunt begged them, but they threatened to shoot her if I did not cooperate with them and so they forced my aunt to watch as 3 of them took turns raping me. There was a gun to my head and my auntie's throughout the incident. When they finished, I couldn't walk, and my aunty begged them to leave me behind because of my condition, but they instead left my aunt to raise money for ransom and also took along a strong man in the community who

supported me as we walked for another two days to the bandits' camp. Upon arriving there, I was kept in a different place, alone. They never gave me food for the three (3) weeks I was there, they only gave me water, but every day 2 to 3 men would rape me for the three (3) weeks I was there. And most time, they called an elderly woman from my community who was kidnapped along with us to watch as they raped me. They'd force me to laugh instead of cry, and they'd be asking if I was enjoying what they were doing to me if I said no, they'll threaten to shoot the elderly woman or beat her up, so I had to tell them that I enjoyed it and cooperated with them as they raped me…"

This illustrates the extreme brutality and repeated nature of gang rapes that women experienced during bandit attacks and kidnappings. Her account reveals how rape is used systematically to dominate and humiliate, as she is raped at gunpoint and forced to pretend she enjoys it or witness harm to others. The dynamics of power and control in the violence are starkly evident.

Another disturbing manifestation of sexual violence described by Ladidi from Kasuwan Magani community in Kajuru LGA is forced marriage. She recounted being abducted by bandits and raped repeatedly before being sold to another group that forced her into a marriage with one of the militants. Her narrative highlights how women kidnapped by armed groups may be trafficked into sexual and domestic slavery through coerced marriages. In Ladidi's words, "While in captivity, I was raped by multiple bandits every day or sometimes every other day, and after a while, I was sold to another set of bandits. I think those are Boko haram because they are very religious and motivated to convert me to Islam. In that camp, one of the bandits indicated an interest in marrying me, and he paid the bride price to their leaders, and they conducted a Muslim marriage for us. I lived with him as his wife while he retained a marabout to teach me the Quran."

Both age groups of FGD Participants from Kajuru LGA, narrating their experiences and the experiences of those in their community, stated;

"Another lady lost her womb because her parents forced her to abort the pregnancy she got through rape by the bandits. It was reported that the doctor didn't handle the abortion well. Afterward, the girl accused her parents of being responsible for the loss of her womb and swore never to forgive them."

"In my case, the bandits raped me; eight women were kidnapped and released the next day after raping us. They did not demand ransom, so they kidnapped us for sex."

"As for me, the kidnapping group that I was taken to do not sleep with women because it nullifies the potency of their charms, so I was not raped. However, one of the bandits collected my skirt as punishment for not cooking well. I was one of the women responsible for cooking in the camp, so their leader asked one woman to give me a wrapper."

Confirmation from focus group participants further underscores the range of violations beyond rape, including forced abortion, sexual exploitation through kidnapping solely to assault women, and other degrading practices like forced nakedness. Together, these accounts from survivors and community members lend first-hand perspectives on the forms of sexual violence being perpetrated against women in the context of conflict. The quotes provide vivid details that put human faces and voices to the violent subjugation of women in these communities. Furthermore, forced abortion is also featured in the drama song by the song participants from the Maraban Rido community in the Chikun LGA community.

The examples provided under this theme highlight the range of violations experienced primarily at the hands of bandits against women and girls in the Chikun and Kajuru communities. The data underscores that sexual violence in this context is tied directly to insecurity and conflict, with bandit groups deliberately employing rape and related violations as a strategy of war and means of domination. Women of all ages are vulnerable to the sexual predation of bandits within a climate of terror and lawlessness.

This theme relates to examining the forms of violence against women and girls in conflict (a vital element of the conceptual framework). The findings reveal diverse manifestations of sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls, including rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and more. This aligns with existing research showing these as common forms of CRSV, providing empirical documentation of violations through firsthand accounts. The brutal nature of violations perpetrated echoes the framework's emphasis on conflict exacerbating risks of violence for women and girls.

Theme 2: Factors influencing experiences of survivors:

This theme encompasses the reaction of community members towards survivors, the roles, influence, and composition of community leadership, interactions, and decision-making processes within families and communities. Family dynamics, stigmatization, and community attitudes were recurrent themes shaping survivors' experiences and well-being.

In their encounters, both FGD participants and Survivors narrated how they are stigmatised in their communities, especially by the male folks; Jummai from Kajuru LGA mentioned that,

"… I went to the hospital when we were released, with my husband, in Sabo Tasha. After the tests ran on me, I was told I was okay, and they gave me some medications. We returned home and have been living peacefully with my husband. However, I am experiencing different stigmatization in my community, and some men will boldly ask me, "Where is your husband?" And when I say he is at home, they will say, "No, not this one, the one in the bush," meaning the bandits; since I returned to my community, I have been labelled a Fulani wife."   This illustrates the pervasive stigma and labels cast upon survivors, as she is derogatorily referred to as a "Fulani wife" and assumed to be sexually linked to her attackers. Her account highlights the destructive social judgments that blame and shame survivors for the violence executed on them.

A Participant from the older age category from Kajuru also reiterated the issue of stigmatization, "In the camp some of us were taken to, the bandits abhor rape, so we were not raped, but on our return, they call us Fulani wives, they refused to believe that we were not raped including some of our husbands." In the same regard, participants also stated that community and extended family pressures sometimes influence interaction within the family, directly determining their experiences. These pressures emanate from the community's norms around female honour and sexual purity.

Another participant from the older age category in Chikun said, "You see, if not that some of our husbands have a fear of God, imagine that as we walk together with them, some people will call us Fulani wives in the presence of our husbands! When they return home, some husbands will pour the transferred aggression on their wives and send them packing." While a participant from the younger FGD age group in Kajuru stated, "Because of stigmatization, many fathers forbid their raped daughters from revealing the truth because the villagers often point at them saying, 'this is the father of the girl that was raped,' and the men often would not want that, some even go as far as wishing or praying that their daughters die or killed by the bandits than bearing the trauma and stigmatization of living with raped wives or daughters."

The focus group excerpts underscore how stigma can translate into active family rejection, as parents cover up pregnancies from rape or husbands cast out wives who were kidnapped. The profound social priority placed on female virginity and fidelity emerges here, as survivors are deemed "spoiled" and unfavorable for marriage after the assault.

Survivors also narrated their experiences in this regard; Ladidi from Kajuru LGA shared how her in-laws immediately assumed her pregnancy did not belong to their son. The assumption reveals how sexual violence is seen to taint survivors and rupture social bonds fundamentally. She narrated, "When I returned home from the kidnappers' camp, my husband was not coming close to me for over a month. His parent even told me to go back to my parents. I know it's because I am not their daughter. However, later, when he started coming to me, I became pregnant. At that initial stage, everything was fine; he

welcomed me with open arms, but his relatives said that my pregnancy did not belong to their son and brother. They poisoned my husband's mind; how can he sleep with a wife that many Fulani men have seen and slept with her nakedness. My husband suddenly changed; he started sleeping in the parlor while the children and I slept in the room. He stopped eating anything I cooked. He started taking care of only himself while I cater for myself and our children. He stopped responding to my greetings or even greeting me. That's how we have been living in the same house. Since I gave birth to this girl, he has not helped me or the girl."

Furthermore, on community interactions shaping the experiences of women and girls, the younger age participants in Kajuru re-echoed the threats and risks of living in the community during the crisis, "there are times that the bandits, send messages to some girls through their informants in the community demanding them to go and have sexual intercourse with them or they will deal with their whole family, to save their families some of the girls will go because the bandits also mingle with our people in the community. There is the case of a lady who was kidnapped and tortured; she was taken to the hospital at her release. She said that one day, she saw one of the Fulani men who tortured her buying something in an Igbo man's shop in their village and smiling at her! But she could do nothing; no one dared to raise the alarm. Unfortunately, some of our boys, when a girl refuses their love advance, will connive with the bandits to kidnap such girls. The bandits often tell their victims, "We know you; we know your house; someone close to you gave us the lead." Some of us that are usually fashionable began to cut off or reduce the elegance with which we dress and appear."

This theme connects to the framework's focus on gender inequality as a driver of violence, highlighting discriminatory norms' role in shaping survivors' experiences. The accounts of stigma, honor concepts, and familial/community rejection demonstrate patriarchal attitudes outlined in the framework as underpinning the revictimization of survivors. Silencing of survivors also provides evidence of the denial of women's agency central to the framework.

Theme 3: Gender Norms and Cultural Practices

The intersection of Gender norms and cultural practices emerged as a significant theme contributing to sexual violence, highlighting gender norms, gender roles, patriarchy, women discrimination, and cultural influences on women. This theme elucidates how patriarchal gender dynamics and discriminatory cultural practices enable and sustain high levels of sexual violence against women. Participants described a culture of male dominance and female subservience that severely constrains women's autonomy and status. Gendered violence is tolerated, especially when women transgress patriarchal norms around feminine behavior and sexuality. Broader ethno-religious tensions also exacerbate matters, as women get caught in cultural conflicts over dating and marriage.

Participants expressed that gender norms often position women to be more vulnerable while perpetuating impunity from both the men in the community and the bandits.

Younger women FGD Participant from Kajuru said, "There are many cases of rape around the villages surrounding Kasuwan Magani. In one village, the bandits commanded that they didn't want to see girls in trousers or shorts, skirts or dresses. When they do, they will whisk them away on their motorbikes and rape them as punishment. Very young girls are perpetually raped by the bandits. If they see you standing with your boyfriend, or any male for that matter, they usually beat the girl up; in some cases, they pick the girl with them and return her to the community when they are done raping her. They don't like seeing us wear shorts. You can see this dress I am wearing now; if they happen to pass by now and see me, I'll be in pepper soup! So usually, girls and ladies wearing shorts or trousers, hearing the sound of motorbikes, will quickly dash for any available wrapper and tie. Kajuru is their route; that's where they follow to access other villages."

The quote from this participant sharply conveys the social sanctions and sexual predation young women face for defying patriarchal rules on feminine dress and conduct. Her account reveals how gender

inequality intersects with the climate of violence, as bandits explicitly police and punish girls' sexuality through rape. The ability of the bandits to regulate women's clothing and sexuality through threats of rape demonstrates women's disempowered position in this setting and the implicit condoning of sexual domination as punishment for violating gender norms.

Younger women FGD Participant from Chikun also confirmed that gender norms and traditional gender roles add to them being susceptible to sexual violence, stating that "the majority of people here believe that traditionally, men are supposed to provide for their families, but because some of the men have been kidnapped or killed while others are outrightly lazy, the women feel they should go out there and get engaged in things that will help them and their children. Some women who do not have what to do give their bodies in exchange for money in trying to fend for themselves. Also, because they engage in businesses, the men tend to use their power; after buying goods or services from the women, the men will refuse to pay them, and they would say to the women, "If you want your money, follow me to my house," thereby luring them into having sexual relations with them." The drama song also highlights how women are discriminated against by the community and their spouses, especially in the wake of the kidnappings and violence experienced.

These remarks underscore how traditional conceptions of male providers and female dependence render women economically vulnerable and susceptible to sexual exploitation in exchange for income. The tensions she notes around women's financial activity demonstrate the rigid gender norms at play.

Younger women FGD Participants in Kajuru referred to existing ethno-religious tensions in their community as a fall out of restrictive gender norms, which created a platform for sexual violence toward them worsened by the current banditry crisis, a participant stated, "In Kasuwan Magani, a particular crisis led to killings between Muslims and Christians occasioned by Muslim men dating and marrying Christian girls. When a young Muslim and Christian man quarrel, the Muslim man works very hard to have sex with his enemy's girlfriend. Usually, when they succeed, they often send the sex tape to the girl's boyfriend. I know of two cases, some of these girls cheaply become prey because of noodles, fried eggs, and roasted meat (suya), but this can also be attributable to hunger on the part of the Christian girls."

Women in this region recognise that they have become collateral damage amid the ethnoreligious crossfire between the men from both sides of the divide; they bear the weight of the impact of the crisis in the form of violence or sexual violence against them. Corroborating this position, the older women FGD in Kajuru also brought it up as a participant said, "It got to a point where our Christian young men beat up Christian girls for giving themselves to Muslim men. So, this is the foundation of the crises in Kasuwan Magani before the kidnappers began to invade our community. In the beginning, the partiality of the Fulani kidnappers further aggravated the fragile peace between Christian and Muslims. After the kidnapping, they often released the Muslims among their victims and held on to their Christian counterparts. So, the whole thing had the colouration of religion." The focus group excerpt about Muslim men dating Christian women highlights how gender intersects with ethnic/religious identity in this setting. The quote reveals how women's sexuality becomes a pawn to perpetuate conflict between groups.

Participants also reiterated the patriarchal nature of their society as placing the males at the centre of decision-making; women's concerns of sexual violence are treated with levity, relegating it to women's issues; hence their security and safety are discounted. For example, a participant in the young ladies FGD stated from Kajuru, "Our voices are not heard because they are deliberately silenced. For example, if, as a lady, I complain of sexual assault to our leaders, I will be challenged. "Is it that you don't have a man in your family that you are here to complain"? They feel that everything should be channelled through a man, even when they fail in their responsibilities."

All participants across the age groups and communities in both LGAs emphasised the exclusion of their perspectives in discussions that touch on their problems and vulnerabilities in the community. There is

a lack of direct female participation in decision-making bodies like the traditional council; as such, even when women's issues are discussed, male leaders maintain control, and women feel their grievances are not adequately addressed. This exclusion from positions of authority limits women's ability to shape responses to the sexual violence crisis.

A participant from the older FGD group from Chikun maintains, "We do not have women as members of our traditional council. However, since the women have separate meetings under the guardianship of a women leader, she takes such issues to the Chief when there is any issue affecting a woman or women. If it becomes necessary to see the women, the Chief conveys the message to them through their leader, giving them the day, the chief will address them. Often, the women are satisfied with how the Chief handles various issues affecting our women, but there are times that the female victims wish they were allowed to express themselves before the traditional council, not by a proxy. Many times, the presentation of our leader does not satisfy us, because we hold different opinions. It is more of a case of 'she who feels it knows it.' This, often brings about more conflict and then the denial of our rights because we are women". In another participant's voice from the younger FGD from Chikun stated, "It is painful that we women cannot sit with the men at the traditional and community meetings to sort out issues that pertain to us because it is a cultural/traditional position. This in some ways, affects women when it comes to a localized rape, that is, rape by a member of our community, not the bandits now. Sometimes the rape victims are asked if they were decently dressed and where they were before the rape.

This demonstrates how the public silencing and exclusion of women reinforce gender hierarchies that trivialize the problem of sexual violence and fail to address women's vulnerabilities and justice needs in meaningful ways. The accounts shed light on the barriers created by patriarchal governance that ultimately serve to condone violence against women.

Participants also highlighted cultural practices that further sustain sexual violence,

Cultural practices and activities that situate women into gender roles put them in additional danger since they have to walk long distances, exposing them to kidnappings, attacks, and sexual violence. Older women FGD Participant in Kajuru, narrated, "There is a village here in Kasuwan Magani, their women can only eat food after carrying heavy logs of firewood to long distances on roads, to sell. Although they live in their husbands' houses, they fend for themselves and their children in Kasuwan Magani by selling firewood. Mere looking at them will convince you that they are living in suffering. It's heartbreaking when you see the husbands of these women; you will think they work in offices. They go to the city to enjoy themselves while their wives suffer from a lack of food for themselves and their children. Some give their bodies to men so that they, especially their children, will have something to eat. The sad aspect is that when such married women are caught, it becomes the talk of the town, with it a harrowing experience for the woman.

Meanwhile, when they commit the same offense, nothing is said or done to the married men. Even when the men are caught and sometimes punished, their punishment is usually a far cry compared to the heavy punishment of the women. Such is our culture, and we dare not complain."

These quotes demonstrate how disempowering conceptions of gender constrain women's autonomy and security while implicitly condoning sexual violence as an enforcement of patriarchal prerogatives. The accounts reveal interlocking dynamics around gender, culture, and violence.

This theme directly exemplifies the gendered risks arising from patriarchal structures central to the conceptual framework. The accounts of male dominance, discrimination limiting women's autonomy, and targeting of women's sexuality all align with the framework's emphasis on patriarchal norms enabling vulnerability. Reports of ethnic/religious tensions leading to women's victimization also mirror the framework's recognition of gender inequality intersecting with other forms of marginalization.

Theme 4: Challenges and Impact on Survivors

This theme delves into the challenges Survivors face and the impact of sexual violence in the aftermath of their ordeal. It details survivors' acute situations after sexual violence, including damaged physical and mental health, social isolation, lost marriage prospects, and family rejection. The immense stigma around sexual violence, amplified by entrenched gender inequities, leads many survivors to be blamed, outcast, or further victimized after their initial assault. However, some survivors highlight the importance of family and community support in facilitating healing. The theme underscores how sociocultural dynamics shape survivor well-being, either exacerbating trauma when stigmatizing attitudes prevail or, in some cases, mitigating harm if met with empathy and care.

Participants expressed that men and women in their society often blame women for their predicament. For example, Talatu, a survivor, stated, "People in my community claim that I desired what happened to me, and they talk about it negatively, that I deserved it since I took myself to live in the village with my aunt to pursue education. The male youth criticize me more, but few women blame me for what happened to me."

Younger women FGD Participant also mentioned, "For ladies who dress seductively when they are raped in my community, not much is said or done about them because there is an unwritten law that such ladies made themselves easy targets for rape."

Survivors narrated that they face challenges in marriage prospects, strained relationships, and breakdown of marital relations in the aftermath of CRSV while stating that family support or rejection can pose a greater risk to their wellbeing or an opportunity to heal and reintegrate as the case may be.

Talatu from Chikun mentioned, "I was in a relationship with the hope of marriage; after the incident, the man and his family declined and told my family that they would not continue with the marriage or relationship since I have been spoiled in the bush. So, since then, I've not had anyone serious come to ask for my hand. Instead, the boys in the community come to demand sex and say that I shouldn't put up any resistance since I have already been spoiled in the bush."

Older women FGD Participant from Kajuru stated,

"Kidnapped women in our community face different challenges; some of them, whose husbands have good understanding, accept their wives back after being released by their abductors and continue living with them. While some husbands either send their returnee wives packing or maltreat them perpetually. This is the case of a woman who hid her husband from kidnappers, so they picked her instead. After spending days in the kidnappers' camp and being released, her husband started maltreating her, marrying a second wife to spite her! The woman who protected him from being kidnapped. Some other husbands might not maltreat or send the returnee wife packing, but they will not have further conjugal relations with her; they instead marry another woman for that purpose."

The drama song ('Zumuntan Mata') participants also highlighted during their discussions composing the song, how women are constantly stigmatized, blamed, and rejected by their spouses after a kidnap incident. The leader of the drama song group (Maman Zumunta in Hausa language) stated, "… when men are kidnapped, we accept them back without holding back, but it's not the same for women; the men reject their wives, and the women go into untold hardship, as a leader, I have mediated over such issues repeatedly, but it doesn't end well for most of the women because the men leave them at the end of the day or the women eventually leave because of beating and insults from the husband and or his family members".

This is a similar occurrence across all the research sites. All four FGD participants and Survivors attest to this fact except for a few situations. One such scenario is the experience of one of the survivors, who mentioned that her family's support has been unwavering and encouraging. Laraba stated, "For me, I was taken to the hospital and treated. My husband has encouraged me because he said I was forced, so

it wasn't my fault." Laraba is married to a pastor, and it is the third time they have experienced abduction as a family in different locations. The husband had been kidnapped twice before Laraba's incident; he has also been mediating between couples' circumstances of Intimate partner violence and offered counselling to men whose wives have been kidnapped and released in his position as a pastor. They have attended different post-trauma counselling together, and she is one of the survivors who has accessed the services of the sexual assault referral centre (Salama Centre.)

Survivors also highlighted physical and psychological strain on their health; in the instance of Jumai, she stated, "The rape experience is traumatic and not an easy thing to bear. The psychological trauma is hard for me to express adequately. When I see a Fulani man, I often feel like going into hiding."

Talatu from Chikun also stated, "Since I am far away from my village for my education, I feel a bit freer to interact and relate with people, but I still feel bad when I remember what happened to me, sometimes I dream about the situation, and I don't like seeing Fulani men."

Ladidi from Kajuru stated Sometimes I feel pain in my stomach, and the doctors said to me that the pain is caused by dirt that has gathered in my stomach; when I went to the hospital, I was told that I had been infected with a disease, but they did not tell my husband.

The documentation of immense stigma, social isolation, marital strains, and health impacts speak to the framework's conclusions about the damaging consequences of violence against women and girls in conflict settings. The findings provide empirical evidence through firsthand experiences on how gender discrimination intersects with conflict to exacerbate devastating harms. As highlighted in the framework, accounts of some women receiving family support point to social resources that could mitigate effects.

Overall, the themes and sub-questions addressed illustrate key elements of the conceptual framework on how conflict, gender inequality, and patriarchal norms intersect to drive risks of violence against women and girls. The findings offer an in-depth qualitative view into these dynamics in the localized context that corroborates and expands upon the framework's conclusions. This study provides further empirical documentation through survivors' voices of the devastating impacts arising from the intersections of conflict and gender discrimination.

Prominent points of convergence and some divergent perspectives between groups were revealed. Key areas of agreement across data sources include rape and sexual slavery as primary forms of violence, pervasive stigma labeling survivors as "Fulani wives," exclusion of women's voices from decision-making, critiques of patriarchal governance, and impacts on marital relations and mental health.

However, some distinctions emerged between generations, with younger women emphasizing sexual exploitation by bandits and ethnoreligious tensions more; this could suggest generational differences in experiences or indicate this is a more salient issue among youth. Older women focused more on economic vulnerability driving exploitation; this may reflect differing familial versus peer pressures. While Survivors understandably highlighted health consequences, community members discussed social impacts likely due to direct trauma exposure among survivors. Such contrasts illustrate nuances in experiences and priorities between groups, while core issues like gender inequality and disempowerment were commonly recognized across data sources.

In conclusion, the triangulation of results across survivor interviews, community focus groups, and drama-song creation revealed more similarities than differences in the perspectives and experiences of conflict-related sexual violence. While some nuances emerged between groups, the predominant finding was that women across generations and roles consistently emphasized the same core issues around forms of violence, stigma against victims, constraints on female agency, problematic patriarchal norms, consequences for health and relationships, and more. Despite minor variations in relative emphasis or priorities, the convergence of these central themes lends credibility and provides a multifaceted yet coherent picture of the dynamics and impacts of sexual violence within this context of localized conflict.

The multiple data sources mutually reinforced shared understandings and realities around the complexity of sexual violence, its roots in gender inequality, and the struggles faced by survivors. The largely consistent insights across groups and methods strengthen confidence in the key results and point clearly to critical needs and directions to assist survivors, empower women's voices, dismantle patriarchal structures, and address root causes to prevent sexual violence in conflict.

Drama Song: https://youtu.be/joR-CDJAQE0

V. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore how different factors interplay to shape the experiences of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the context of banditry conflicts in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. The main research question asked how various factors influence survivors' experiences, with sub-questions examining the forms of violence, factors influencing survivors, gender norms enabling violence, and consequences. This discussion reviews how the study's key findings relate to existing literature and the conceptual framework, highlights limitations, and points to practical applications and future research opportunities. The study adopted a qualitative approach, allowing for an in-depth examination of survivors' perspectives within the specific context of Chikun LGA. As highlighted in the methodology, the case study design enabled a focused investigation of the research issue within this real-world setting.

The researcher's constructivist orientation meant prioritizing participants' voices and lived experiences. Her background in community development proved advantageous, shaping the collaborative, flexible approach employed. Close ties with the marginalized Christian communities in southern Kaduna helped the researcher gain access, build trust, and understand cultural contexts. This facilitated the collection of sensitive personal accounts. The researcher's empathy for the plight of these groups also influenced her focus on amplifying their perspectives. However, this solidarity could potentially introduce bias. Still, her constructivist emphasis on representing participants' views as authentically as possible mitigated this risk. Overall, the researcher's unique combination of an empathetic, participatory orientation and intimate knowledge of the cultural context strengthened the quality and credibility of the qualitative data collected. Her background enabled her to form respectful partnerships with participants to bring forward the research issues from their perspectives. In any case, banditry conflicts are more prevalent in the south versus northern Kaduna, which informed the study location selection. Despite her strong ties to these communities, the researcher still encountered significant challenges carrying out fieldwork as an outsider. Her privileged position as an educated urban researcher was juxtaposed with participants dealing firsthand with profound hardship. No amount of cultural familiarity could erase this underlying disconnect. She constantly reflected on her ethical obligation to minimize harm and give back to participants. Traveling to insecure field sites filled her with apprehension, and listening to traumatic accounts carried an emotional weight and evoked instinctive reactions like tears or anxiety. Yet she persevered, driven by a commitment to amplify marginalized voices. Reconciling her constructivist aims with her outsider status and distress over participants' plight remained an enduring struggle. She tried for humility and reflexivity regarding her inevitable biases and power. Through open dialogue and developing relationships of mutual dignity, she hoped to convey participants' perspectives credibly while advocating for social justice in her work.

Beyond emotional and ethical burdens, she encountered time, funding, and bureaucracy constraints. Organizing extensive fieldwork on a tight timeline proved extremely difficult logistically and financially. Navigating complex institutional approval procedures delayed data collection. Transportation issues abounded on risky roads. Managing communications and compensation ethically within a resource-scarce environment added further complications.

The qualitative case study approach allowed for an in-depth investigation contextualized within the real-world setting of Chikun and Kajuru LGAs. Employing multiple methods—FGDs, interviews, and an innovative drama-song—enabled triangulation across diverse data sources, bolstering credibility. A strategic sampling of different age groups and communities facilitated capturing multiple perspectives for richer insights, including individual and group data collection bridged personal experiences with social norms. Participatory techniques fostered open expression about sensitive issues. Prolonged engagement over nine (9) drama-song sessions increased rapport and candor. Iteratively adapting methods to field realities enhanced contextual credibility and ethical rigor. Verbatim transcription and translation followed by quality checks boosted accuracy. Manual coding leveraged the researcher's intimate knowledge for rigorous analysis. Triangulating findings across groups and sites revealed

commonalities, strengthening credibility. Overall, the combination of immersive qualitative techniques, strategic sampling and analysis, participatory design, and adaptable approach enabled the collection of credible, context-specific data on a complex social issue.

The data suggest that the experiences of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Chikun and Kajuru LGAs are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including the forms of violence perpetrated, stigmatization and blame from the community, family dynamics of rejection or support, exclusion of women's perspectives in decision-making, restrictive gender norms and cultural practices, and severe consequences for survivors such as damaged relationships and psychological trauma. The findings indicate that patriarchal norms, gender discrimination, and lack of community support create an environment that exacerbates vulnerabilities and enables high levels of sexual violence against women amidst the conflict.

Based on a review of the literature, the findings of this study are largely consistent with previous research on the links between conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and gender inequality. Specifically, the literature review highlighted how patriarchal gender norms that position men as dominant and justify violence against women are a root cause of CRSV (Kreft, 2020; Kreft 2022). This aligns with the study's findings that traditional patriarchal structures, gender discrimination, and unequal power dynamics enable high sexual violence against women during the conflict. The literature also emphasized how armed groups exploit these patriarchal norms to deploy sexual violence to terrorize populations strategically (Drumond, 2016). Similarly, the current study found that kidnappings and armed groups' activities strongly influence sexual violence in the context.

Regarding consequences, the literature outlined the severe physical, mental health, social, and economic impacts of CRSV on survivors (Ba & Bista, 2017). The findings confirm these devastating effects, with survivors facing trauma, stigmatization, damaged relationships, and more. Thus, this study reinforces the conclusions from prior research that CRSV arises from and reinforces gender inequality and patriarchal structures. The findings illustrate this link in a new context but support existing knowledge on the gendered drivers and impacts of sexual violence in conflict. The mistreatment faced by CRSV survivors from partners and husbands can be characterized as intimate partner violence (IPV), demonstrating a connection between CRSV and IPV that aligns with prior research (Svallfors et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2022). By exploring IPV dynamics, this study provides evidence from a new setting supporting links between conflict-related sexual violence and subsequent intimate partner violence suggested in other conflict settings worldwide. It highlights how CRSV and IPV intersect within cycles of gender-based violence.

The findings of this study support the conceptual framework presented, which shows the intersections between conflict, gender inequality, and economic crisis in driving violence against women and girls (Ellsberg et al., 2021). While the framework is on the broader concept of Violence Against Women and Girls in the three contexts of conflict, gender inequality, and economic crisis and covers multiple forms of VAWG, the current study is narrowed on sexual violence in the context of conflict and gender inequality, making its specific focus on conflict-related sexual violence relates most directly to the overlap between conflict and gender inequality.

The findings demonstrate how the context of protracted conflict in the study setting, coupled with deeply entrenched patriarchal gender norms, enables various forms of sexual violence against women and girls. In particular, the accounts of rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and other violations speak to how armed conflict actors exploit gender inequality and discrimination to perpetrate sexual violence as a tactic of war. The brutal treatment survivors face also stems from the patriarchal attitudes underpinning victim blaming and stigmatization. Furthermore, excluding women's voices from decision-making aligns with the framework's emphasis on patriarchal practices denying women agency and rights. Overall, the study's findings on the gendered drivers and impacts of conflict-related sexual violence offer

an empirical example that aligns with the intersections described in the conceptual framework. While not examining economic crisis, the results corroborate the role of conflict and gender inequality in shaping risks for women and girls. One area where the current study provides additional insight is in documenting the specific cultural and contextual factors that enable sexual violence in the particular setting of Chikun and Kajuru LGAs. For example, the findings highlight the role of ethno-religious tensions, restrictive norms of female honor, stigmatization of victims, and exclusion of women's perspectives as influencing factors specific to this context. However, the narrow scope represents a trade-off in depth and breadth. The study does not encapsulate the full panorama of threats outlined in the adopted conceptual framework examining the intersections of conflict, gender inequality, and economic crisis influencing multiple forms of violence against women and girls. Incorporating economic aspects and additional forms of gender-based violence could have provided more comprehensive insights.

Nonetheless, the in-depth qualitative findings make valuable contributions by personifying this issue and grounding it in survivors' voices. Centering survivors' perspectives is essential because it uplifts marginalized voices, informs better solutions, and promotes agency and healing for survivors. Their insights and accounts are invaluable, though often overlooked. Research and interventions can become more inclusive, responsive, and transformative by incorporating survivors' voices. This study makes several valuable contributions to research on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). First, it provides in-depth qualitative insights into the perspectives of marginalized women affected by sexual violence within the understudied context of localized banditry conflicts in northwestern Nigeria. Much existing research focuses on CRSV in large-scale civil wars, so this exploration of CRSV dynamics amid decentralized violence by armed groups offers new knowledge. The women's detailed personal accounts help humanize this issue and counter dehumanizing narratives that objectify victims. By elucidating survivors' experiences in an overlooked setting of communal conflict exacerbated by ethno-religious tensions, this study expands the geographic diversity of CRSV research, often concentrated in only a few countries.

Additionally, the findings reinforce feminist explanations highlighting patriarchal social structures as a root cause of conflict-related sexual violence. By directly linking survivors' trauma and mistreatment to the gender discriminatory norms and attitudes prevalent in the local setting, the study offers empirical experiential evidence to support this theoretical perspective. Participants' accounts of patriarchal limitations on women's agency and the brutal impacts of rape used as a weapon of war align with the feminist emphasis on CRSV arising from broader systems of gender inequality and subjugation.

Finally, the themes identified through the qualitative analysis provide a strong foundation for future research examining sexual violence dynamics within similar contexts of localized conflicts characterized by decentralized violence, communal tensions, and instability. The findings point to directions for further investigating how family and community responses, gender norms, ethno-religious divisions, and other sociocultural factors may influence experiences of CRSV in settings marked by dispersed armed groups and inter-communal hostilities. This study sets the stage for more extensive qualitative and quantitative research that can expand understanding of sexual violence affecting women and girls within complex, crisis-affected settings beyond conventional civil war contexts. The study also lays the groundwork for future research to quantify prevalence, establish causality, and evaluate interventions. With continued expansion addressing limitations, this study sets the stage for a more comprehensive investigation of intersecting risks facing women and girls in conflict-affected regions. Such work can ultimately inform advocacy and solutions to transform discriminatory norms, assist survivors, and prevent conflict-related sexual violence.

Several implications arise for developing concrete solutions grounded in the findings of this study, which could be implemented through coordination with stakeholders in the local setting. Tailored education programs incorporating results could help transform harmful attitudes, enabling violence at the community level. Alongside this, aid programs should provide trauma-informed mental health support

catered specifically to the psychosocial needs directly identified by survivors. From a policy standpoint, advocacy is essential to counter discrimination against women, culturally empower marginalized groups, and promote gender equality for sustainable change. While these findings suggest helpful directions, further in-depth engagement with local organizations would allow the formulation of context-specific recommendations matching available resources and capacities. This highlights the importance of participatory development approaches that center local partners' knowledge to translate insights into practical interventions responding to survivors' realities.

While implications arise for on-the-ground responses, the researcher recognises the need to situate such efforts in sustainable initiatives to consolidate gains. Thus, sustainability factors to consider in developing interventions and responses are that short-term aid must be paired with longer-term empowerment and systemic change for sustainable impact. For instance, transforming discriminatory patriarchal gender norms requires enduring educational and advocacy efforts to alter social patterns truly. Trauma-informed care should also take a strengths-based approach to building resilience and capacity to enable survivors' lasting reintegration. Sustainability necessitates meaningful local ownership and investing in communities' capabilities to sustain positive outcomes beyond temporary external assistance. Interventions that engage local partners for participatory development of context-specific solutions will most likely result in sustainable, locally-led transformation. This study points to the value of favoring communities' knowledge, priorities, and resources to drive systemic, lasting solutions centered on equity and justice.

VI.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study contributes to understanding women's experiences affected by conflict-related sexual violence in the context of banditry conflicts in Chikun and Kajuru LGAs of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Forms of violence documented include rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and more. Survivors face immense stigma and rejection from families and society, exacerbating trauma. The findings reinforce gender inequity as a fundamental driver of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict. The complex factors influencing survivors' experiences are embedded within discriminatory gender norms and cultural practices that present a spectrum of risk spanning pre-conflict, active conflict, and post-conflict periods. Critically, the very gender dynamics that enable sexual violence also shape survivors' encounters with stigma, rejection, and trauma. This points to an interconnection and overlap of oppressive norms and practices that exacerbate sexual violence across all phases. This establishes a complex interplay of factors that shape survivors' encounters with sexual violence amidst the ongoing insecurity and communal tensions.

Recommendation

Based on the study's outcome, the following are recommendations are made to Human Rights Monitor; the Research Commissioner to guide in designing and informed intervention in the study site.

1.   Amplify the voices and agency of women by establishing inclusive platforms and processes to increase women's meaningful participation and leadership in decision-making around sexual violence response and prevention. This could involve things like:
    i.   Ensuring representation of women, particularly survivors, in traditional governance structures and security response institutions.
    ii.   Creating community-level forums for women to voice priorities, concerns, and solutions related to sexual violence.
    iii.   Building capacity for women's grassroots organizations to take action on identified issues and collaborate on solutions.
    iv.   Targeted leadership training and empowerment programs to build women and girls' skills in public speaking, policy advocacy, human rights awareness, and civic engagement.
    v.   Awareness-raising with men and leaders on the value of women's participation and supporting their safe, meaningful involvement.
    vi.   Advocacy to reform laws, policies, and resource allocation to reinforce women's decision-making power in the home, community, and wider systems.

The goal is to move from silencing women's voices to active inclusion and leadership to drive positive change. Amplifying women's voices and agency is essential for mobilizing community action, developing effective solutions, shifting patriarchal governance norms, and upholding the human rights of women and girls. Other generalized recommendations that will strengthen and consolidate the project design include:

1. Develop specialized psychosocial services and outreach to survivors, integrating traditional healing and strengths-based approaches to promote resilience and social reintegration.
2. Design community awareness programs incorporating findings to transform harmful norms and attitudes around victim-blaming and gender discrimination.
3. Train security forces on trauma-informed handling of sexual violence cases and conduct to avoid re-victimization.
4. Implement gender-transformative programs engaging men and traditional leaders in reflection on harmful masculinities and power imbalances.
5. Form survivor-centered communal networks to provide social support, referral services, and collective healing.

6. Channel development aid in sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment programs for women vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

These recommendations aim to address root causes of gender inequality through systemic changes, community engagement, and survivor support. Key principles are localization, participation of women and survivors, and sustainability through shifting norms versus one-off aid. Consequences considered include community resistance, need for gradual transformation, and resource limitations. Continued research and adaptation will be critical as interventions are implemented in this complex setting.

Importantly, the recommendations are an initial guide to design projects as one main recommendation is to hold participatory consultations and co-design sessions with women, survivors, youth, and community leaders from the research sites to collaboratively develop context-specific interventions matching their priorities.

Engaging research participants and their communities directly in shaping project development from the outset will help ensure local ownership, incorporate contextual knowledge, and match interventions to expressed needs and resources. A participatory co-design process recognizes participants as experts and empowered partners versus passive beneficiaries. Their active collaboration on shaping solutions can build sustainability through local investment and leadership. Consulting the research communities will yield critical insights to inform planning and maximize impact.

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APPENDIX

MURNA CIKIN AZABA

A.Waiyo-ya ubangiji- kasar mu ta rude

Waiyo ya ubangiji kasarmu ta bacce

Rayuwa-rayuwa na yenzu (2x)

Mataye-suna sha wahala (2x)

Rayuwa- rayuwa na yanzu

Mazaje su bar mana abubuwa da yawa

Rayuwa-rayuwa na yanzu

Wasu mazaje ba ruwasu da yayasu

Rayuwa-rayuwa na yanzu

Bass: waiyo –ooo-o-o

All: makarata yaya mata ne   Bass: suke yin komai

All: abinci yaya mata ne   Bass: suke yin komai

All: sutura yaya mata ne   Bass: suke komai

All: lafiya yaya mata ne   Bass: suke yin komai

B. kina zama ki --- a gida miji ki zaya maida ke agaba shi ke ba komai

Kina da hikima-kina da ilimi   duk da haka zai maida ke ke ba komai ba

kina aikin ki-kina kasuwacin   duk da haka zai maida ke ke ba komai ba

C. Ubangiji ka cece mata kamar yanda ka cece isra'ilawa a hanu firauna(2x)

Bass: Ga shi idan an dauke mace zu-wa-daji

Idan ta dawo za'a kai ta asibiti a wanke cikin ta

idan ta zo tayi cikin---za a ce na Fulani ne, bana mijin ta ba-----

to menene ya kawo haka----domin a dauke mu, mataye ba abaki komai

yaya zamu yi mu mataye------

sai muyi han-kuri, fa da mazaje mu---------

yaya zamu yi mu mataye--------

Mu mika kai mu zuwa ga ubangiji

S.P Ba zamu damu ba

Mu masun albarka ne

Mu masun murna ne

ALL: Domin yesu mu yana da rai

Kada mu damu Allah mu yana nan kada mu damu (2x)

Oh muyi addu'a ga mazaje mu

Oh ya allah kaji tausayi mutane

Idan su dawa maza na guje su

Oh- kidnapers sun matsa mana oh

Allah ka sa mana albarka

The drama song conveys the challenges faced by women in the context of the banditry crisis ongoing in Chikun and Kajuru LGAs and the dimension of gender inequality attributed to this challenges, while recognizing the need for support and prayers. Here's a general interpretation of the song:

Verse A:

This part of the song acknowledges the confusion and difficulties faced in the country. It emphasizes the suffering of women in the present time, with references to various aspects of their lives such as food, clothing, and well-being of their children being the sole burden of the women. The lyrics express that women bear many responsibilities and challenges.

Verse B:

In this verse, the lyrics talk about women having wisdom, knowledge, and doing their jobs but still remain obscure in of the family and community, the outcome doesn't always reflect their efforts. It suggests that despite their efforts, women may not always receive the recognition or benefits they deserve.

Verse C:

This part of the song references a prayer to God, asking for salvation similar to how God saved the Israelites from Pharaoh's oppression. It implies a plea for divine intervention and protection.

Chorus:

The chorus seems to convey a message of resilience and faith. It acknowledges that despite the challenges faced, the belief in God's presence and mercy remains strong. It encourages not to worry because God is with them.

Bridge:

The bridge portion discusses a scenario where a woman is Kidnapped to the forest and then returned to the hospital for womb cleansing. It suggests the possibility of a woman being wrongly accused of infidelity or and stigmatized with her unborn child linked to her abductors by the husband, family and community. The lyrics imply the need to address such stigmatization and challenges faced by women.

Final Chorus:

The final chorus reinforces the idea that they don't care about the judgments of others, emphasizing that they are blessed and happy because of their belief in God.

Overall, the song touches on issues of women's roles, challenges, and the importance of faith and prayers in overcoming difficulties presented in the conflict. It highlights the need for support and understanding in society.