

INTERROGATING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE GIRL CHILD IN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS' CAMPS IN BENUE STATE AND WHAT FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of girls living in IDP camps in Benue State, Nigeria, and what FBOs could do to ameliorate their sufferings. The conflict in Benue State has occurred between the Fulani pastoralists, or herdsman, and the indigenous people of Benue and it has led to the displacement of thousands of girls. Literature has not yet addressed the experiences of girls in internally displaced camps and the work of faith-based organisations in the various camps. Three camps in Benue State were chosen by the researchers. They are the Makurdi, Guma, and Agatu camps. Thirty (N = 30) in-depth interviews (IDI) with female IDPs in Benue State were conducted by the researchers. The participants were purposively selected. A semi-structured interview was adopted, and the data was analysed using content analysis. Emergent themes include the environment of the girl child in IDP camps, reasons for the abuse of the girl child in IDP camps, and impacts of the abuse on the girl child in IDP camps. Girls in Benue State's internally displaced people's camps endure appalling living conditions, including little access to basic amenities, a high risk of sexual exploitation, and few options for employment and education.

Keywords: Girl Child, IDP, Benue State, FBO, Nigeria, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts arise in Benue State as a result of the Fulani herdsman and indigenous people pursuing conflicting demands and aspirations. Furthermore, this dispute—which turned violent—between the Tiv and the Jukun people as well as between farmers and Fulani herders has come to characterise intergroup relations in the state (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehim, 2019). It is thought that insurgency, desertification, population growth, and border conflicts are the main causes of this conflict. Benue State is located in the middle belt region of Nigeria. Tiv, Idoma, Igede, and Etulo make up the majority of the people in Benue State, among others. Agriculture is the primary way of their subsistence. The state was established on February 3rd, 1976, and is home to the minority tribes of Hausa, Jukun, and Igbo. Conflicts between the main indigenous groups and the smaller tribes have been reported. For example, the Tiv and the Jukun have been extremely antagonistic towards one another regarding fishing regions (Charles, 2022) and territorial conflicts, or boundary disputes (Gbaoron, 2020). In 2001, there was also a violent fight between the Jukun and Tiv over land ownership and politics (Ukiwo, 1999). Over 300 women and children lost their lives (Ejembi, 2019). In actuality, on April 21, 2022, 20 people died in Waya in Jato-Aka in Kwande Local Government Area, Mbapa, and Ikyande in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State (Johnson, 2022). On June 13, 2022, 15 people died in Edumoga, Benue State (Duru, 2022).

¹ **FUNDING:** This research was sponsored by TETFUND in the year 2024 under the institutional based research (IBR) projects with project number TETF/DR&D/CE/UNI/NSUKKA/BR/2024/VOL.I.

Benue State has seen violence and property devastation between 2010 and 2022 (Charles, 2022). According to Majekodunmi (2014), these wars have occurred between the Fulani pastoralists, or herdsmen, and the indigenous people of Benue. From January 1, 2018, to June 30, 2018, more than 1,105 people lost their lives, according to Amnesty International. Amnesty International's analysis also shows that, with over 378 deaths, Benue had the largest number of killings in the middle belt region, followed by Plateau with 340 victims (Relief Web, 2019). According to Gbaka (2014), the main cause of the rise in violent conflicts in Benue State is the herdsmen and their livestock that are migrating from Niger, Cameroon, and Chad through the northeast to the central belt of Nigeria, which includes Benue State. The reason the conflict has continued to worsen is because Benue farmers and Fulani nomads are vying for green land due to environmental scarcity (Obioha, 2008). Population growth, climate change, and unsustainable farming practices have resulted in shrinking farmlands, which has increased competition for land resources and greatly fuelled the violent conflict between the Hausa-Fulani herdsmen and the people of Benue in recent years. The unfortunate news is that there was an unparalleled loss of life and property, regardless of the source. A large number of people, mainly women and children, have been displaced (Babajide, 2022). Young women, teenagers, and adolescents have been the victims. The majority of the young men and men who fought in the fight were murdered, leaving the girl kid to rely on her supporters. The girl kid suffered maltreatment from both the people who killed or injured her parents and the people in charge of the camps for internally displaced people. Because of this tragic trend, the girl child in Benue State has continued to be the victim of abuse and prejudice, which keeps her from realising her full potential in life (Kupoluyi, 2021).

There are numerous studies on the conditions of camps for displaced persons and the experience of women and girls. According to internal displacement monitoring group (2020), women often face greater challenges than men in securing a decent livelihood in displacement, with repercussions on their ability to find shelter and security and to access education and healthcare. They also tend to be less able to make their voices heard or participate in decisions on matters that affect them. They are often more likely to flee in the face of conflict, violence, disasters and climate change, and are therefore at greater risk of displacement. Oseghale (2024) in his study of IDP in Abuja camps discovered that the Wassa camp in Abuja hosts over 7,000 IDPs and about 70 percent are children and young women of reproductive age. He further asserted that women IDPs lack access to essential health services like contraceptives, antenatal care, safe delivery services, and postpartum care. Sexual activity within the camp leads to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, for which there is also little recourse. Furthermore, Due to a lack of access to safe abortion, women—especially young ones—are forced to employ risky methods that put their lives in peril. Desalegn, Kasseye, Gebeyaw, & Meshelemiah (2023) in their study on IDP in Ethiopia discovered that there is systemic (gender-based violence, family separation/disintegration, human trafficking, and genocide); psychological (trauma and stress; loss of home/personal belongings); and social (lack of social security and stability, reintegration and resettlement problems, unmet basic needs [physiological and physical health], and maladministration of supplies. Also, these researches have abandoned the roles that FBOs could play towards women IDPs. This study will focus on the situation of women and girls in IDP camps in Benue State, Nigeria.

Benue state is home to numerous internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. IDP camps are temporal shelter where the displaced people are kept. This include schools and abandoned fields. There are 1.5 million people living in different internally displaced people (IDP) camps in Benue State, according to Guardian (2022). The stories of young girls being sexually, psychologically, and physically assaulted on a regular basis in these IDP settlements are concerning. In IDP camps, there have been reports of girl child malnutrition, rape, and deaths. There are graphic accounts of teenage girls being raped due to security breakdowns, as well as instances when rapists have pretended to be IDPs. This is a form of violence against girls based on their gender. Gender-based violence falls into the following general categories: Overt forms of abuse include physical assault (such as battering and sexual assault), psychological abuse (such as forced marriage, sexual harassment, and deprivation of liberty), deprivation of resources necessary for physical and mental well-being (such as food, shelter, education, and employment opportunities), and treatment of women like commodities (such as trafficking in women and girls for sex). It is quite concerning how careless the reports coming from the camps for internally displaced people are. The report on the crisis that resulted in the displacement of women and children to internally displaced people's camps has garnered a lot of attention, but little is known or discussed about the experiences and abuse that occur in these camps in Benue State. Furthermore, not much is known about the efforts made by faith-based organizations (FBOs) to help victims of various sorts of abuse in Benue State's IDP camps, or about what they may do in this regard. Faith-based organisations are those that were founded by people who have a direct or indirect connection to a particular faith, and they are more and more involved in development and humanitarian relief (Khafagy, 2020). Faith-based organisations' actions have an impact on objectionable cultural customs, including child marriage and female genital mutilation in the state of Benue. Mostly churches are FBOs and some non-governmental organizations are also FBOs. Sadly, it is unknown if faith-based organisations have had a genuine influence on the lives and means of subsistence of girls living in internally displaced camps. Based on this premise, the study examines the diverse experiences and maltreatment of female internal migrants and the consequences for religious institutions.

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of girls living in IDP camps in Benue State and what FBOs could do to ameliorate their sufferings. Examining these experiences entails interrogating the victims and relatives of the abused. First, this study looks into the conflict in Benue State. Second, it explores the conditions that girls live in IDP camps. Third, it looks at the causes of girls' mistreatment in IDP camps. Fourth, it discusses how abuse affects girls living in IDP camps. Finally, it projects the strategies that faith-based organisations could use to improve the situation of girls living in internment camps.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The initial purpose of internally displaced persons' camps was to provide short-term care for those who had been forced from their homes due to strife in Benue State. This is due to the fact that the majority of elite farmers are displaced persons living in camps after being driven from their homes by renegade bandits or herders (Guardian, 2022). It was meant to serve as a safe haven for the displaced. On the other hand, the opposite is true. Approximately 500,000 men, women, and children live in impoverished conditions in improvised camps intended for internally displaced people (IDP) in Benue State (Editor, 2020). Families on the run currently reside in multiple IDP camps throughout the state of Benue. Nonetheless, there have been

allegations of different kinds of maltreatment of girls throughout the state. The majority of girls were unable to continue attending school (Onyegbula, 2022). The fact that there is violence, sexual exploitation, and harassment against women and young girls in the camps housing internally displaced people (IDPs) is particularly concerning. It is purported that these crimes are committed by security personnel and other Benue state officials (Editor, 2016). According to reports, women and girls are coerced into forced sex in exchange for food, shelter, and safety from other camp males who would harm them or their families (Ugwa, 2021). The literature has not yet addressed the experiences of girls in internally displaced camps or the work of faith-based organisations in Benue State, despite advancements in examining various aspects of the lives of those living in internally displaced persons camps in Nigeria (Lawrence, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative design. Three camps in Benue State were chosen by the researchers. They are the Makurdi, Guma, and Agatu camps. The degree of the female child maltreatment was a factor in the researchers' selection of our research sites. All participants were relocated from their respective places of birth in Benue State and were at least 18 years old. Thirty (N=30) in-depth interviews (IDI) with female IDPs in Benue State were conducted by the researchers. A total of ten (N=10) oral interviews were conducted in Makurdi, Guma, and Agatu camps. Semi-structured interview instructions were translated into Tiv and Idoma, with appropriate reverse translations. With the aid of study facilitators who helped with language translation during interviews, the primary author and co-authors collected data. The duration of each interview was roughly thirty minutes. The interviews were verbatim transcribed from audio recordings. For ethical accuracy, the informants were told about the use of the study. They were also informed about the anonymity of their names in the study. Thus, when the data was gotten from them, their real names were coded into P1, P2, P3, among others. The data was audio recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. This means that it is only women and girls who are either victims or friends of the victim that were interviewed. In Table 1, the names and other demographic characteristics of the informants are given.

Table 1: Socio-demographic information of participants

	Coded Names	Gender	Age	Camp	Tribe	Religion
1	P1	Female	22	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
2	P2	Female	21	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
3	P3	Female	24	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
4	P4	Female	19	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
5	P5	Female	20	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
6	P6	Female	18	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
7	P7	Female	25	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
8	P8	Female	29	Makurdi	Idoma	Christianity
9	P9	Female	22	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
10	P10	Female	23	Makurdi	Idoma	Christianity
11	P11	Female	22	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
12	P12	Female	22	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
13	P13	Female	26	Guma	Idoma	Christianity

14	P14	Female	28	Makurdi	Igede	Christianity
15	P15	Female	23	Agatu	Igede	Christianity
16	P16	Female	21	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
17	P17	Female	20	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
18	P18	Female	21	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
19	P19	Female	22	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
20	P20	Female	19	Guma	Idoma	Christianity
21	P21	Female	20	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
22	P22	Female	32	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
23	P23	Female	33	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
24	P24	Female	26	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
25	P25	Female	25	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
26	P26	Female	25	Guma	Tiv	Christianity
27	P27	Female	25	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
28	P28	Female	21	Makurdi	Tiv	Christianity
29	P29	Female	22	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity
30	P30	Female	21	Agatu	Idoma	Christianity

Source: Authors Compilation

The data was analysed using content analysis. This method helped the researchers to examine communication content, such as written, spoken, or visual materials, in order to identify themes, patterns, and meanings within the data that was transcribed. The emerged themes include: i) the environment of the girl child in IDP camps; ii) reasons for the abuse of the girl child in IDP camps; and iii) impacts of the abuse on the girl child in IDP camps.

CONFLICTS IN BENUE STATE

The conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State, Nigeria, has been a significant security challenge, resulting in numerous deaths and property destruction (Barango-Tariah et al., 2023). Land disputes are identified as the primary cause of these conflicts, with both parties often resorting to forceful strategies (Barango-Tariah et al., 2023). The implementation of an anti-open grazing policy has shown some success in mitigating conflicts by prohibiting livestock movement on foot and establishing ranches (Udeh et al., 2024). Various conflict resolution strategies have been proposed, including involving traditional and community leaders, encouraging dialogue between parties, and strengthening disciplinary committees (Oboegbulem & Alfa, 2013). However, perceptions of effective resolution strategies differ between farmers and pastoralists, with farmers favoring the anti-grazing law and pastoralists advocating for designated grazing areas and established cattle routes (Oguntolu & Sani, 2021).

THE CONDITIONS THAT GIRLS LIVE IN IDP CAMPS

Girls living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Benue State face numerous challenges related to their safety, health, education, and overall well-being. The conditions in these camps, which were set up to shelter people displaced by conflicts, are often inadequate and fraught with human rights concerns, especially for vulnerable groups like young girls.

The environment of the girl child in IDP camps

Overcrowded Camps

According to P2 (Oral Interview: 2024),

The camp is overcrowded. The camps lack adequate space for girls to take care of themselves. You will find three girls struggling to sleep on a small foam.

The girl child needs a comfortable space, thus the crowded nature of the camp makes them prone to health challenges. Sometimes, the girls stay with their families in these crowded space. It was on this premise that P13 (Oral Interview: 2024) observes that:

Space in the camp is a challenge. Most families have to struggle to stay in a small canopy. The girls are forced to sleep with the boys in same space which gives room for sexual abuse.

The girls and boys sleeping on same space makes room for their discomfort and abuse. Sometimes, these boys may not be their blood relation. It was based on this that P29 (Oral Interview: 2024) noted that

Girls are forced, directly and indirectly, to share these shelters with strangers. Some of these strangers inconvenience them, steal from them, and even try to commit homosexual activities with them.

Boys sleeping with strangers is different from girls sleeping with strangers. Some of these strangers may not be IDP, but people will ill motive.

Poor Sanitation and Hygiene

Public health in IDP camps seems to be overlooked in IDP camps in Benue State. P3 (Oral interview: 2024) exposed that:

In our camp, there is an increase in infection, due to overcrowding. Many people use the same pit latrine. In fact, many girls engage in open defecation because the toilet is sometimes filled up.

Open defecation seems to be the order of the day in IDP camps. This can cause the infection of drinking water in the camp. On this premise, P10 (Oral interview: 2024) noted that:

Finding clean water in this camp is difficult. Tanker sometimes brings water once in one month. This water finishes in a very short time. Then we start recycling dirty water to drink and bathe. This is why there is an increase in skin diseases in the camp.

P11 (Oral Interview: 2024) narrated thus:

There is an increase in malaria and cholera. This is because of bad drinking water. Also, the mosquitoes are much due to the many grown grasses. We are not given mosquito nets. We use wrappers to cover ourselves.

Water-borne diseases seem to be much evident in IDP camps. Unfortunately, even the efforts of public spirited individuals are thwarted. P1 (Oral Interview: 2024) lamented that:

People come to donate sanitary pads to the girls in IDP camps. Unfortunately, people take these pads to the market and sell them. In fact, it is those people who are supposed to distribute the pads who take them to sell for their private benefits.

No psychological support

In words of P17 (Oral Interview: 2024),

There are no counselling services in the camp. Many girls are passing through crisis, but no one to tell their problems.

P16 (Oral Interview: 2024),

Some girls would have had avenues to voice out all the abuse they are made to go through. But there is no counselor. This is the reason for the increasing depression and psychological collapse of some people.

Women passing through challenging periods need psychological support. Thus, the lack of counselling services and guardians for girls and women has far-reaching implications.

Reasons for the abuse of the girl child in IDP camps

Threatened with Malnutrition

Inadequate nutrition, brought on by a lack of food, a failure to use the food that is consumed, or a combination of these factors. According to P4 (Oral Interview: 2024)

Most times, girls are denied food in IDP camps. When an official in the camp wants a sexual relationship with a female, and she refuses, he will use other officials to make sure that the girl and her female have little access to amenities in the camp.

In the words of P25 (Oral Interview :2024),

The security men like the police and soldiers who were brought in to take care of us are harassing us. There is one security man that said that if I do not have sex with him, he will make sure that I do not see food or anything good in the camp. Some of my friends have also reported the same issue.

Lack of good food and health environment puts women and girls under unnecessary pressure.

This is the reason that the officials at IDP camps used food to threaten women and girls IDP.

Expulsion from IDP camp

Some women and girls have been threatened to be expelled from the camp. In the words of P 30 (Oral Interview: 2024),

My friend was threatened that if she fails to agree to the relationship of one of the camp officials, she will be chased out. Many girls who agreed to them were given enough food. Those who rejected were made to suffer in the camp.

P27 (Oral Interview: 2024) lamented that:

I am a married woman. My husband was killed in my village. I came here, but the men that are taking care of us used to disturb me to have intimate relationships with them. In fact, one said that he would lay allegation on me that I stole and I would be chased from the camp.

IDP camps seem to be the only alternative that displaced women and girls have. This is the reason that the officials of IDP camps know this and always use it as a threat towards girls and women.

Impacts of the abuse on the girl child in IDP camps

Rape

The impacts of the experiences of girls and women in IDP camps cannot be underestimated.

According to P4 (Oral Interview: 2024),

It was in the night that one of the sons of our neighbour forced himself on me in the toilet. I could not tell anyone because of shame.

Furthermore, P7 (Oral Interview: 2024) lamented that:

I was raped by the policeman who was helping me in the camp. He used to give me food and even clothes. The food and clothes were usually brought to our camp by some organizations. He called me one night by 9 pm and I was thinking it was the food as usual. He held my mouth and raped me.

Rape has both long and short terms effects on women and girls. The girl feel ashamed especially when the rape becomes a public issue.

Prostitution

In the words of P6 (Oral Interview: 2024),

In the night, some of the girls in the camp used to go out to find money. Some men come in the night to take them. In the morning, the girls will come back.

In the words of P5(Oral Interview: 2024)

Some of the officials are the ones who contact girls and tell them about the prostitution business. They will tell the girl the benefits without telling them the negative effects. The officials in the camp also collect their share from the person who comes to pick the girls and from the girls when they return in the morning.

Prostitution most times is directly and indirectly driven. Poverty, peer pressure and society based factors cause women and girls to go into prostitution in IDP camps.

Death

There have been cases of death in IDP camps. P9 (Oral Interview: 2024),

One of my girl friends went for night prostitution. Till today we have not seen her. Nobody is saying anything. All they say is that she is an adult and should know what is good or bad.

Furthermore, P8 (Oral Interview: 2024),

There was a case of one girl who is my neighbour in the camp. The taxi that came to carry her to the hotel had an accident. Both the girl and the taxi driver died.

P14 (Oral Interview: 2024) lamented that:

In the distribution of relief materials, many people would be struggling to collect. Things are not done orderly most times. There was a woman whose child fell from her back and died when she was struggling to collect relief material. It is really painful as a woman.

It seems that the deaths of women and girls IDP are given little attention by organisations and communities, such as non-government organisations and community based organisations.

Teenage Pregnancy

In the words of P12 (Oral Interview: 2024)

There are issues where girls of below 15 shares were raped and they have pregnancy. If you see some of these girls in the camp, they look dirty without antenatal. Their parents could do nothing to avoid being chased from the camp.

P28 (Oral Interview: 2024) is of the view that:

Some of these girls have had complications during childbirth. There was a case of one of the teenage girls that was helped to deliver in the camp. After the child came out, the girl started bleeding. She was rushed out of the camp to where I do not know.

Teenagers in IDP camps are many and have little or no understanding of pregnancy. They are less likely to open up due to shame and social isolation.

Unsafe Abortion

There are cases of successful and failed abortion in camps. According to P18 (Oral Interview: 2024),

I had a friend. She tried abortion. She nearly died in the camp. I do not even know the plant she ate, and the thing started disturbing her.

P15, P21, P23, and P24 (Oral Interview: 2024),

Many girls are doing abortions in the camp. Some parents do not even know that the girl child has committed abortion. In fact, one of us here has done it, and we supported her. We know it is not good, but there is nothing any girl has here to take care of herself and her child.

Abortion among girls in IDP is done in a crude way. This makes maternal and child mortality and morbidity to be a reoccurring decimal.

Increased illiteracy

In the words of P22 (Oral Interview: 2024),

I have not gone to school for three years now. We are just abandoned in the IDP camp. Most girls' parents are not financially strong for sponsoring the education of their girl child.

P19 (Oral Interview: 2024),

The difference between this camp where I am staying and my school is far. I cannot trek the distance. I have no money to be paying for a motorcycle.

P20 (Oral Interview: 2024),

My school uniform was burnt down. My books were destroyed. My school was burnt down. So where do I start. Where do I see money to buy a uniform, new exercise, and text books.

P26 (Oral Interview: 2024),

Some of our teachers have run away. Some were killed. Some people lost their hands and legs. Our school is just like a graveyard. For me to start, I need to attend a new school. Start buying books, textbooks and uniform.

Girls in Benue State's internally displaced camps endure appalling living conditions, including little access to basic amenities, a high risk of sexual exploitation, and few options for employment and education. A multitude of circumstances, like substandard living conditions, economic hardship, gender-based violence, and the disintegration of social safety institutions, contribute to the abuse of girls in Benue State's internally displaced camps.

DISCUSSION

The study shows that the environment in IDP is not conducive for the girl child. There is overcrowding, poor sanitation and hygiene, and a lack of counselling services. This is in line with the research of Okwute, Okwute, and Ibrahim (2020) that there are also cases of sanitary, overcrowding, and the condition of the physical structures of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in Maiduguri, Borno State. This shows that issues of hygiene permeates all IDP camps. This is similar to the findings of Ekezie, Myles, Murray, Bains, Timmons, and Pritchard (2021). They carried out a study on IDP, and the data from 2253 IDPs showed 81.1% (CI = 79.5–82.7) experienced one or more health conditions; however, over 20% did not access healthcare services, and the most common diseases were malaria, fever, typhoid, and diarrhoea. Thus, water borne disease which was also revealed to be pronounced in IDP camps in Benue, is also prevalent among the participants of Ekezie et al study. Furthermore, Benedict, Michael, and Enem (2022) noted that counselling, which is a one to one interaction between professionally trained counselor and a client bothering with series of social adjustment problems with the aim of helping the client out of his/her problems is lacking in IDP camps.

Furthermore, the findings of the study show that there are many reasons for the abuse of girl children in IDP camps. This is because they are threatened by malnutrition and expulsion from the camp because they fail to agree to sexual relations with their aggressors. This is in accordance with the study of Asabe, Mahya, Emmanuel, Ribah, & Fatai (2022:41), which revealed that there were reports of sexual violence in the camp, as affirmed by 70.1% of the respondents, and that most of the victims were adolescents (61.4%) and a few adults (24.4%), with 64.6% of the respondents attesting that the victims of the sexual violence do not visit the health facility for post-exposure prophylaxis. This shows that teenagers are the most abused. Shame, social isolation and ignorance affects the ability of these girls to seek support from hospital. Furthermore, Bawa, Kaur, & Rao (2022) reveal that women IDPs are at high risk of sexual abuse since they lack adequate protection as a result of a destroyed family network by the conflict and displacement. The global disruption to education caused by conflict, sexual violence, and displacement is without parallel, and the effects on learning are severe.

The study further shows that the impacts of abuse of a girl child cannot be underestimated. It has led to rape, prostitution, death, teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and increased illiteracy. This is in line with the findings of Danjibo & Akinkuotu (2019), who noted that members have used force and threats to rape women in internally displaced persons camps in various IDP camps in Benue State. Furthermore, Agbaje (2020) explained that there is increased objectification of female bodies in terms of rape, mutilation, forced pregnancy, physical assaults, and forced labour in various IDP camps. Aham-Chiabuotu, Abel, and Thompson (2021) noted how their inability to afford food or funds caused them to trade sex for food or cash, and how parents force their daughters to do the same or force them into early or forced marriages and Girls who are internally displaced and young women in different contexts are equally vulnerable to sexual abuse, prostitution, and child trafficking. Marlow, Kunnuji, Esiet, Bukoye, & Izugbara (2022) explained that these sexual encounters leave girls and young women extremely vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, STIs, and gender-based violence. Rohwerder (2016) noted that desperation and the desire to look for other ways to survive financially and defend themselves might lead female migrants into the clutches of human traffickers. Many wind up in abusive situations of one kind or another, such as prostitution, domestic slavery, urban child begging, or hazardous jobs in farms and textile factories.

STRATEGIES THAT FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS COULD USE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION OF GIRLS LIVING IN INTERNMENT CAMPS

They following approaches may be adopted by FBOs towards women and girls IDP in Benue State:

1. Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) can play a pivotal role in improving the situation of girls living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps by leveraging their resources, networks, and moral authority to address the specific challenges faced by these vulnerable populations. These organisations are often deeply embedded within communities and trusted by locals, giving them a unique position to influence positive change.
2. FBOs should begin to provide humanitarian aid, including food and clean water, to people living in IDP camps in Benue State. This will reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, such as transactional sex in exchange for basic necessities.
3. FBO can collaborate with local and international partners such as non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, civil-based organisations, USAID, and UNICEF, among others. The aim is to provide safe and secure shelters for girls, ensuring that they have dignified living conditions. This could be achieved through the distribution of appropriate clothing and sanitary supplies.
4. There is also the need for FBOs to partner healthcare providers, both private and public. They could set up clinics or mobile health units to ensure that girls in IDP camps have access to reproductive healthcare, psychological counselling, and treatment for injuries or diseases related to abuse. FBOs can also advocate for girls' access to vaccines, prenatal care, and postnatal care for young mothers.
5. FBOs can establish safe spaces within camps where girls can feel protected and access psychosocial support. These spaces could serve as centres for trauma healing, group therapy, and the sharing of experiences. FBOs can train female counsellors or volunteers to provide these services. FBOs can work with camp management to ensure there are clear, safe channels for reporting abuse, and they can support survivors in accessing justice and healthcare services.

6. FBOs can establish or fund education programs for girls in IDP camps. By setting up temporary schools or facilitating transport to nearby schools, they can help ensure that girls do not lose out on education. Faith-based teachings can also be incorporated to promote positive values such as respect, dignity, and empathy.

7. FBO could offer vocational skills training (such as sewing, hairdressing, or computer literacy), which may empower girls economically and reduce their dependence on others. FBOs can partner with local businesses or NGOs to provide training and even offer microloans to support small business startups within the camp.

8. Finally, FBOs can use their influence to advocate for stronger legal frameworks to protect girls from abuse and exploitation in IDP camps. They can engage with policymakers to push for improved protection laws, better camp governance, and stronger enforcement of existing laws against gender-based violence and exploitation. FBOs could also work with national and international human rights organizations. This will ensure that the rights of girls in IDP camps are respected and that they are treated with dignity. Faith-based organisations can provide training on human rights and the importance of gender equality within their communities.

9. Faith-based organisations can offer counselling services to help girls deal with the trauma of displacement, violence, and abuse. These services can include both spiritual guidance and professional psychological counselling to address mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. FBOs can offer spiritual support through religious teachings that emphasise healing, hope, and recovery. By providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance, FBOs can help girls cope with the emotional and psychological impacts of their experiences, fostering resilience.

CONCLUSION

The interviewees believed that sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of girls was a regular occurrence in camps for internally displaced people. Participants characterise the physical atmosphere as traumatising, noting that it facilitates and makes it harder for perpetrators to abuse girls and makes it harder for victims to fight back. The need to survive, a lack of oversight, the indifference of religious institutions, the lack of integrity and discipline displayed by camp security guards, the dread of being haunted by witches, and the absence of social media presence were also emphasised by the participants as contributing factors to the abuse of female children. Faith-based organisations are uniquely positioned to address the needs of girls in IDP camps in Benue State. By providing basic necessities, education, healthcare, and psychosocial support, FBOs can mitigate the effects of displacement and abuse on girls. Their influence within communities can drive cultural change and challenge harmful gender norms, while partnerships with governments and humanitarian agencies can ensure that girls receive the comprehensive support they need to thrive. Addressing both the immediate and long-term needs of girls in IDP camps requires a multi-faceted approach, and faith-based organisations have a crucial role to play in this effort.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) for their generous financial support and sponsorship. This research would not have been possible without their commitment to promoting academic excellence and research in Nigeria. We also thank the University of Nigeria TETFUND for their support, resources, and opportunity to conduct this study and contribute to the field. We are deeply grateful for their investment in our academic and professional development.

FUNDING

This research was sponsored by TETFUND in the year 2024 under the institutional based research (IBR) projects with project number TETF/DR&D/CE/UNI/NSUKKA/BR/2024/VOL.I.

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