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**THE ROLE OF NGOs AND GOVERNMENT
AGENCIES IN ADDRESSING SEXUAL
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN LAGOS
STATE, NIGERIA**

A Research Paper Design

by:

SOFUNMADE REMILEKUN BOLANLE

ERNA NUMBER: 656320

NIGERIA

MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

SJP

Supervisor:

SILKE HEUMANN

Second Reader:

KARIN ARTS

The Hague, The Netherlands

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Disclaimer:

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Inquires:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. BOX 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: <http://facebook.com/iss.nl>
twitter: @issnl

Location:

Kortenaekade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

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Acronyms

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

BRT - Bus Rapid Transit

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
Against Women

CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DoI - Date of Interview

DSVA - Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency

DSVRT - Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organisations

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

VAPPA - Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act

WAPA - Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation

WARIF - Women at Risk International Foundation

WHO - World Health Organisation

Abstract

This study seeks to understand the roles of non-governmental organisations and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State, Nigeria. Due to the high rates of sexual violence in Lagos state, the study seeks to understand what these organisations do to support survivors, the challenges they face in supporting survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State and possible suggestions to improve their efforts. The study adopts a qualitative approach involving interviews with staff from DSVA, Mirabel centre and Project Alert. The data is analysed to identify common patterns and themes related to the study. The findings reveal that NGOs and government agencies in Lagos State provide medical and emotional support, legal help, awareness campaigns, emergency shelters, and economic empowerment programs. These activities work together to offer support to survivors and tackle the root causes of sexual violence. The study also identifies four main strategies these organisations use: legal frameworks, capacity building, education campaigns, and support services. However, they face challenges such as patriarchal norms that discourage reporting, delays in legal processes that prolong trauma, and limited resources that hinder the delivery of care. The study suggested implementing legal policies, allocating resources, and educating the public. The study calls for better collaboration between NGOs, government agencies and community members to strengthen these efforts. These actions could create a safer environment for women in Lagos State and ensure survivors get the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Keywords:

Sexual violence, patriarchy, NGOs, Government, Agencies, women, Lagos State, Nigeria

Chapter 1

1.1 Research Problem

Sexual violence is a universal reality where someone manipulates or forces someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. It affects men, women, and children causing harm to families, individuals and communities (National sexual violence resource center, 2010). In almost all countries, irrespective of age, class, status, or religion, women experience violence in almost all aspects of life whether at work, home, school, government institutions, or street (Wanka et al., 2019). Throughout human history, relations between men and women have involved many forms of discrimination based on gender (Obagboye & James, 2022). However, specific groups of women are particularly vulnerable to violence such as refugees and internally displaced women, migrant women, women with disabilities, women living in poverty or HIV/AIDS, rural women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, among others. In Nigeria, women are vulnerable to violence at all stages of life (Obagboye and James, 2022) and over 30% of girls and women aged between 15 and 49 are reported to have experienced sexual abuse in 2022 with some of these incidents of violence tragically resulting in the death of victims, the rape of children, including ancestral rape (Ajayi et al., 2023; 286). Sexual violence (rape and sexual assault) account to 17% of total incidents (Obagboye and James, 2022; 44). In Lagos state, between 2016-2019, 43.9% of women and girls had experienced physical violence (Okenwa-Emegwa et al., 2016; 1), which was significantly higher than the national average of 27.8% (Awolaran et al., 2021; 113).

Nigeria has well equipped policy frameworks to pursue gender equality. It is a signatory to key international and regional instruments such as The Beijing Platform for Action (1995); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979); the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the rights of women in Africa (2005); the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities

(CRPD, 2006); and the Millennium Development Goals (2000). In addition, the Government of Nigeria passed the Child Rights Act (2003); the Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2007); the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA, 2015) and established the Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency Law in 2021 to promote gender equality and inclusiveness in development.

Despite the presence of a legislation against violence against women, sexual violence has continued to persist in Lagos State (Osime, 2021). On March 7, 2022, the naked body of a 22-year-old woman was discovered on a roadside near Carter Bridge on Lagos Island. Nine days earlier, precisely on February 26, a fashion designer and the last child of her parents, had boarded the city's transit bus, Bus Rapid Transport (BRT), after leaving work. The driver of the vehicle abducted her, assaulted, and raped her before throwing her lifeless body out of the moving vehicle. This has created panic and apprehension in the State with women and girls feeling even more vulnerable despite assurances to the contrary by the government (Izzi & Umunna, 2020).

If this situation persists in Lagos state, then families will continue to break, gender inequality will rise creating psychological and mental suffering of children due to less family support among others. Studies have focused on how common this violence is and how it affects women, girls, and specific vulnerable groups (Ajayi et al., 2023; Obagboye & James, 2022). However, there is little research on how well current support services and responses from NGOs and government agencies work. There is also limited information about the challenges faced by organisations and ways to improve their efforts. Addressing these gaps is important to better support survivors and reduce sexual violence in Lagos State. It is upon this background that the research aims to understand the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State, Nigeria which was pursued by determining the following objectives:

1. To find out activities undertaken by NGOs and government agencies to support survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State.
2. To identify challenges faced by NGOs and government agencies in supporting survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State.

3. To suggest strategies to improve responses to sexual violence against women in Lagos State.

1.2 Justification and Relevance

This study is relevant to development studies because it seeks to add a fresh perspective to the body of knowledge on sexual violence by interrogating the phenomenon from an angle that is yet to receive sufficient attention from scholars. This is likely due to increased reporting of sexual violence cases in Lagos State following the establishment of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA) in 2021, which is housed within the Lagos State Ministry of Justice, as well as the support provided by NGOs. The study investigates the activities of the agency and NGOs to document and track the efficacy of their efforts in reducing sexual violence in the State. At the end of the research, it is my humble expectation that I would be able to provide new evidence on the roles of NGOs and government agencies in providing support to survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State. Understanding the support of the Agency and NGOs towards survivors of sexual violence is important to address a public health concern. WHO set a Sustainable Development goal SDG 5 on gender equality and women empowerment SDG 5.2 is one elimination of violent against women and girls.

1.3 Contextual Background

Sexual violence occurs anytime is coerced, forced or manipulated into any sexual activity. Such act can be in form of rape/sexual assault, child sexual assault and incest, unwanted sexual touching/contact, sexual exploitation, intimate partner sexual assault, sexual harassment, masturbating in public, showing a person's naked body to other(s) without consent, or watching someone in private act without their permission (National sexual violence resource center, 2010). Sexual violence can be non-physical and include intrusive sexualised questions of a sexual nature, unwanted sexualised comments (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). According to Smith et al

center (2018: 1), one in five women experienced rape in their lifetime and 13.5percent of women experienced forced penetration. Because it often takes place within the home and between two people in an intimate relationship, sexual violence is difficult to curb before it gets out of hand thereby often leading to life-changing consequences for victims who are mostly women. It is not limited to women as it affects both genders, however, women are usually at the receiving end which creates existing gender inequalities that hinder economic development progress (Okenwa-Emegwa et al., 2016). Violence against women is seen as gender discrimination from historically unequal power relations between male and female preventing women from having the same rights and freedoms in society as their male counterparts (Airaoje et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, culture is patriarchal seen in male entitlement and expectation of service, obedience and loyalty from the woman (Margolis, 2019). The expression that “a woman’s place is in the kitchen” indicates that women have no other role except domestic work. This means that cultural myths continue to justify this brutal treatment of women with some describing violence against women as a private family affair while certain religious texts empower the husband to maintain discipline within the household including over his wife (Childress et al., 2024). Other myth says that women are raped or sexually harassed because they asked for it by dressing seductively. This is further elaborated in section 55 of the Penal Code, Laws of Northern Nigeria “husband to “correct [] his wife” as long as it does not amount to “grievous hurt” (Nigeria Penal Code Act). This means a husband cannot be guilty of rape even if he forcefully has sex with his wife without her consent. This is alongside divorce and property laws and a number of customary practices that disadvantage women that try to escape abusive marriages. It is evident that in Nigeria, sexual violence remains a challenge which limits women’s autonomy, opportunities and subjects them to poverty (Eteng & Eyisi, 2022).

Before 2003, there were no national laws in Nigeria protecting women from violence including traditional and cultural practices like female genital mutilation that harms women in Nigeria. However, the Domestic and Sexual

Violence Agency Law (2021) was established in Lagos State Ministry of Justice to coordinate immediate response to sexual violence by rescuing and supporting survivors to get help. The DVSA also provide financial assistance, shelter, medical and legal support to survivors of sexual violence. Also, between 2021 and 2022, the DSVSA handled over 5,624 cases of which 2,331 were domestic violence cases, 90 rape cases, 72 sexual assault cases and two sexual assaults by penetration cases (Adeniyi, 2023; 1). The 5624 cases show an increase in reported cases compared to previous years, thus, the creation of the DSVSA has improved greater awareness and willingness among survivors to report incidents, even though the overall prevalence of sexual violence may not have changed. The DSVSA has been commended by scholars, non-profit and the Nigerian media as a bold step to address sexual violence in Lagos State (Osime, 2021). But the continued persistence of brutality and violence against women in Lagos State and the hesitation by women to report abuses to the police and agencies devoted to sexual violence mitigation raises questions about the roles of these NGOs and agencies, hence the importance of this research.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

With the objective to understand the roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State. The following research question and sub-questions are proposed.

Main question:

What are the roles of non-governmental organisations and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State?

Sub-questions:

1. What activities are undertaken by NGOs and government agencies to support survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State?
2. What challenges do NGOs and government agencies face in supporting survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State?

3. What strategies can improve the response to sexual violence against women in Lagos State?

1.5 Chapter Outline

The research paper was organised in chapters. Chapter one explained the magnitude of continued persistence of brutality and violence against women in Lagos State. It identified questions that guided study based on roles of these NGOs and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women and why this research is important.

The second chapter reviewed related theories and studies on the roles of NGOs and government agencies in addressing sexual violence. The chapter explained feminist standpoint theory and how was applicable in my study. The chapter also reviewed other scholars who have studied sexual violence against women and how their findings were used in my study in Nigeria.

Chapter three explained the methods and techniques that the paper followed to collect and analyse data. The methodology section explained the application of a qualitative phenomenological design in my study. It addressed how the participants were selected including how the data was collected using interviews. The section also explained how the collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. I explained the ethical concerns, scope, positionality and limitations (if any) encountered.

The chapter four presented the findings and discussion. The chapter presented, analysed, interpreted and discussed findings in line with the study research questions. Various themes obtained were highlighted per research question, interpreted and discussed with theory/studies to understand whether they agree with my findings.

The last chapter (chapter five) highlighted the conclusion and recommendations for policy and future studies. The conclusions were made by explaining what the study found out in line with the main research question and the sub-

questions. While practical recommendations to the NGOS and policy recommendations for government agencies were made basing on the findings to address sexual violence in families.

Chapter 2

2.1 Theoretical framework

Feminist standpoint theory

Feminist standpoint theory examines the power dynamics that shape institutional responses to sexual violence in patriarchal societies. At its core, the theory argues that knowledge is socially situated, meaning that the experiences of people within social hierarchies give them unique views of dominant institutions (Campbell, 2022). This study is based on data from interviews with service providers in non-governmental organisations and government agencies. They occupy a specific standpoint where they can support survivors. For institutions addressing sexual violence, feminist standpoint theory indicates the importance of valuing views from those directly engaged in survivor support as they confront and navigate the systemic biases embedded within patriarchal structures. In feminist epistemology, the marginalised, whether survivors of violence or the people who work with them, hold valuable knowledge that exposes the mechanisms of social inequality. As True and Tanyag (2018) argue, understanding how power operates through institutions is important for developing better strategies for intervention. The feminist standpoint helps us understand how patriarchy works within institutions to shape the experiences of people who help survivors of sexual violence. For service providers, this means their role involves providing immediate support and advocating for structural change that could dismantle institutional biases against survivors. In societies where men hold most of the power, these structures are reflected in how NGOs and government agencies are set up and how they handle cases of sexual violence. This influence of patriarchy in institutions creates challenges for service providers, as they must work within and against these systems to fully support survivors.

Beverly McPhail's Feminist Framework Plus (2016) offers a new way of understanding sexual violence against women by integrating knowledge from multiple feminist theories. McPhail argues that no single theory fully explains the motivations behind sexual violence, which goes beyond the traditional

view that it is solely about power and control. While this perspective, rooted in Radical Feminist Theory, has been essential in explaining that sexual violence is tied to male dominance, McPhail believes it only tells part of the story. In broadening the understanding of sexual violence, McPhail integrates five key ideas that impact institutions' approaches to service provision for survivors. For example, McPhail's concept of 'Patriarchal power and control' emphasises how societal male dominance directly impacts the responses survivors receive when they seek institutional support (McPhail, 2016; 4). Service providers face difficulties reconciling the needs of survivors with deeply rooted institutional biases that prioritise male viewpoints or minimise female experiences. The second idea, 'Normative Heterosexuality perspective,' argues that sexual violence is not only an act of power but also tied to societal norms that implicitly condone such acts within heterosexual relationships. For service providers, this means they need to address survivors' trauma in ways that challenge these norms, even if it is contested within the institution (p. 5). The third concept, Intersectional Feminist Theory, argues that sexual violence cannot be understood without considering the intersections of race, class, and other forms of oppression. Women of colour, for example, are less believed by the legal system, while perpetrators of colour face harsh legal consequences. Service providers encounter this complexity as they advocate for survivors across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and address the different levels of institutional bias that affect each case. Intersectionality informs service providers that their support strategies should be adaptable, recognising the unique vulnerabilities of each survivor and the compounded barriers they face within institutions (McPhail, 2016; 5).

McPhail's fourth concept explains that sexual violence is related to societal norms of masculinity, seen as an extension of traditional masculine behaviors rather than as a deviant act. For institutions, this perspective challenges them to move beyond standard procedural responses and dismantle the cultural norms that permit such behaviors. The fifth concept, 'Embodied Sexual Practice Perspective,' notes that each woman's experience of sexual violence is unique, with physical and psychological impacts that vary widely.

Service providers should be equipped to give personalised care that respects the individuality of each survivor's experience. In practice, this means institutions must not take a one-size-fits-all approach to survivor support, as doing so risks invalidating the survivor's personal experience and intensifying their trauma. As a result, McPhail's framework informs institutions that they should take a context-sensitive approach when developing survivor support programs (McPhail, 2016; 7).

In addition, feminist theories point out that legal systems struggle to fully address sexual violence because of deep-rooted biases and patriarchal values in the criminal justice system (Graham, 2024). Legal frameworks are important for punishing offenders (Griffins, 2019). However, they do not provide enough support to survivors, especially those who are marginalised by factors like race, class, or gender identity (Bazaanah & Ngcobo, 2024). These show up in practices such as blaming survivors, doubting their accounts, and not fully understanding the mental impacts of trauma. Survivors from minority groups face unfair treatment, with their stories questioned more than those of people from more privileged backgrounds (Morrison, 2005). Also, the high standards of proof needed in court make it hard to prove cases of sexual violence where evidence is limited (Aranburu, 2010). These issues create serious challenges for NGOs and government agencies seeking justice for survivors, as they have to work within a system that does not put the needs of survivors first (Graham, 2024).

Lekalakala (2015; 15-17) argues that patriarchal power structures create gender inequalities, leading to poor support for survivors. Service providers in this study reported difficulties in dealing with these systems, showing how patriarchal norms weaken efforts to fight sexual violence. For institutions, this means that patriarchal structures unintentionally limit the resources and authority of staff to advocate for or support survivors. Feminist standpoint theory also helps us analyse the weaknesses in the current methods used by NGOs and government agencies to address sexual violence. The theory explains that the institutional biases that hinder complete survivor support can be mitigated by considering the perspectives of service providers working

within patriarchal systems. Service providers, especially those working in male-dominated settings, illustrate how these practices sometimes fail to fully support survivors. Campbell (2022) argues that feminist knowledge comes from the lived experiences of those marginalised by these systems – explaining how power maintains inequality. In this study, the experiences of service providers who work in male-dominated environments show how patriarchal structures impact the survivors and those responsible for helping them. This view calls for institutions to engage with frontline providers’ feedback, as they are well-positioned to identify gaps and advocate for improvements within these patriarchal structures. In response to the complexity of sexual violence, NGOs and government agencies provide many services such as medical, psychological, legal, and economic support (Schopper, 2014). Medical services treat injuries and address long-term health effects like chronic pain or reproductive issues. Psychological support is for therapeutic care that helps survivors manage symptoms of trauma like anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Hegarty et al., 2016). Legal assistance supports survivors in the intimidating judicial processes, helping them understand their rights and preparing them for court proceedings if they choose to pursue justice. Economic support, such as vocational training or financial aid, empowers survivors to rebuild their independence for those who may be financially dependent on their abusers. Safe housing services provide immediate, secure shelter to survivors, protecting them from further harm and helping to stabilise their situation as they engage with other forms of support.

Feminist standpoint theory examines how power imbalances between men and women manifest in personal relationships and institutions. Heron et al. (2022) explain that women who rely financially on their partners often feel trapped in abusive relationships due to the lack of social support. In this study, service providers noticed that survivors from poorer backgrounds struggle to access help, partly because of the same systems of inequality. This aligns with feminist standpoint theory, which elaborates on the structural conditions that shape women’s experiences of sexual violence. For institutions, this perspec-

tive shows that the presence of different support options improves the immediate needs of survivors and the social and economic challenges they face. Service providers in this study pointed out that norms like victim-blaming and the acceptance of male dominance make it hard for survivors to seek help. Roberts (2021) explains that sexual violence is not just an individual crime but part of a larger social system that enables such violence to persist. The information from service providers in this study shows how these norms are strengthened through institutional responses that do not fully challenge the patriarchal values supporting sexual violence. Institutions that counter these norms are better positioned to create survivor-centered policies that reduce stigma and encourage survivors to come forward.

On the other hand, Pemberton and Loeb (2020) argue that a woman's financial situation affects her experience of violence and her ability to access services. Survivors with fewer resources face more challenges in obtaining services, showing that both patriarchy and capitalism perpetuate inequality. For institutions, this indicates that survivors' economic vulnerabilities must be considered in service provision strategies. Providing subsidised services or collaborating with organisations that offer financial assistance help institutions address the economic dimensions of survivor support. Thus, feminist standpoint theory shows that different systems of oppression intersect to marginalise survivors and those trying to help them. These interconnected forms of inequality enable service providers and institutions to advocate for more inclusive support frameworks. Therefore, feminist standpoint theory reveals that sexual violence is an issue of individual actions and also of larger societal structures that create inequalities. We can better understand survivors' challenges in accessing resources and how institutional biases increase these challenges. Institutions must respond to individual cases and engage with the social and economic dimensions of survivors' experiences.

Institutional support for survivors of sexual violence

Research shows that survivors of sexual violence require wide range of support services that address their physical, psychological, and legal needs (Anderson & Overby, 2020). One of it is psychological support which sometimes

short-term and include counseling and therapeutic support aiming to stabilise survivors in the immediate aftermath of violence (Gomez, 2022). Psychological services are insufficient in patriarchal societies where stigma and victim-blaming are prevalent and discourage survivors from seeking help (Koepke, 2024). Service providers try to create an empowering environment that reduces these stigmas. However, the lack of resources among staff remains a barrier to effective service provision. In addition, legal aid services are important for helping survivors find the complexities of the judicial system, especially in cases where pursuing legal action against perpetrators is challenging. Legal support provided by institutions includes representation, assistance with restraining orders, and support during court processes (Holland et al., 2021). McPhail (2016) shows that women of color and survivors from low socioeconomic backgrounds face disproportionate challenges in obtaining justice, encountering biases that influence the outcomes of their cases. Another form of institutional support for survivors of sexual violence are medical services aimed at addressing immediate physical injuries and longer-term health impacts such as STIs, trauma. Forensic exams are important for gathering evidence; however, literature shows that these services are inconsistently available, especially in resource-limited settings (Forkey et al., 2021). Service providers report that patriarchal norms impact the provision of medical services as survivors are made to feel responsible for the violence they have endured. Antonsdottir (2020), having trained legal professionals who understand the challenges that survivors face improves the likelihood of successful legal outcomes. However, legal advocacy is underfunded and causes delays and limited access to good representation – discouraging survivors from pursuing justice (Chisholm, 2021). Service providers in this study noted that survivors who received legal advocacy felt more empowered and were more likely to persist through the justice system. This form of support facilitates access to justice and also contributes to sense of agency for survivors.

More so, economic support helps survivors regain autonomy and rebuild their lives after experiencing sexual violence. Financial independence is a big

challenge especially for survivors who were financially reliant on their abusers or lack the means to support themselves (Natalya Clark, 2022). Organisations have several economic empowerment programs such as skills training, job placement, financial literacy, and microloan services that help survivors attain financial stability and reduce their dependence on others. Makario (2023) argues that economic empowerment initiatives within support agencies enable sexual violence survivors to establish sustainable livelihoods. However, these programs are underfunded and inconsistently implemented, especially in low-resource settings, where such initiatives only reach a small portion of those in need. Service providers in this study noted that survivors who received financial support or job training reported a greater sense of control over their futures. Another form of institutional support involves community outreach initiatives that aim to shift public perceptions, reduce stigma, and create safer environments for survivors (Liebowitz et al., 2023). These focus on raising awareness about the prevalence and effect of sexual violence as well as educating communities about the resources available for survivors (Bonar et al., 2022). Outreach initiatives involve collaborations between NGOs, government agencies, schools, and religious institutions to facilitate cultural shift. According to Armistead et al (2021), educational programs on consent and healthy relationships prevent incidents of sexual violence. However, these programs are hindered by societal attitudes and cultural resistance, especially in communities with deeply rooted patriarchal norms. Service providers participating in these outreach efforts have reported that some programs are met with resistance (Kirkner et al., 2021).

With the growth of digital technology, many institutions have started to use digital platforms as a way to provide accessible support to survivors. Digital services include helplines, virtual counseling, and online resources that provide information on survivors' rights and available services. These platforms are valuable in reaching survivors who live in remote areas, have mobility challenges or fear the stigma associated with seeking in-person help. Wood et al. (2022) showed that digital support services have increased accessibility for survivors of sexual violence, giving them anonymity and ease of

access to essential resources. Many non-government organisations now provide online chat services, mobile apps, and social media channels to connect with survivors quietly (Voth Schrag et al., 2022). However, digital support is hindered by technological barriers, including limited access to reliable internet or devices in low-resource settings such as Lagos State. Service providers established that digital support services are priceless for reaching a wider range of survivors and helping them initiate their journey to recovery (Gjika & Marganski, 2020).

From the above discussion, feminist theories help us understand the challenges that NGOs and government agencies face in dealing with sexual violence in Lagos State. The work of these institutions is limited by unfair systems such as patriarchal values and bias in the legal system and by race, class, and gender that affect access to help for survivors. This research was able to establish how organisations work around obstacles to provide support to survivors of sexual violence.

2.2 Sexual violence in Lagos State, Nigeria

In Lagos, women face various types of abuse from their intimate partners including physical assault, sexual violence, threats of violence and psychological/emotional abuse (Yari et al., 2021). Men abuse their partners due to three main factors: personality and family background, stress, and using violence as an expression of masculinity (Tadesse et al., 2022). In the past, cases of molestation and sexual abuse involved women from puberty onwards (Tesfaw & Muluneh, 2022).

2.2.1 Legal framework

The legal framework in Lagos State on sexual violence is designed to protect survivors and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. The Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Law (Lagos State Government, 2021) provides guidelines for handling cases of sexual violence. Specifically, Section 5(1) defines various forms of sexual violence, while Section 8 mandates that healthcare providers and law enforcement agencies report cases within 24

hours. Also, Section 12 outlines the procedures for protection orders to be issued to survivors. These legal provisions form a critical framework for addressing sexual violence in Lagos State. The Criminal Code Law of Lagos State also addresses sexual violence including offenses such as rape, sexual assault, and indecent assault. It prescribes severe penalties for these crimes to deter perpetrators and ensure justice for survivors. The Lagos State government has implemented the Child Rights Law that offers special protections for children against all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation (Bolutife et al., 2022). To support these laws, Lagos State has established the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT), a multi-disciplinary agency that coordinates responses to cases of sexual violence. The DSVRT provides legal aid, medical care, and counseling services to survivors, ensuring they receive support (Udombana, 2019).

In addition, The Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPPA) was passed into law in May 2015 as a response to the increasing need for protection against various forms of violence in Nigeria. VAPPA 2015 aims to provide protection for all individuals including women, from diverse forms of violence. It is an improvement over the existing Penal and Criminal Codes regarding violence. It criminalises acts of violence and includes provisions for compensating victims and protecting their rights. The Act addresses a wide range of violent acts, including physical, sexual, psychological, and domestic violence, as well as harmful traditional practices and discrimination. One of the key objectives of VAPPA is to eliminate violence in both private and public life. It seeks to prohibit all forms of violence and to offer maximum protection and effective remedies for victims. VAPPA aims to ensure that victims receive justice and support, thereby promoting a safer and more just society for all (Obagboye and James, 2022).

2.2.2 Institutions addressing sexual violence in Lagos state

Many institutions and organisations in Lagos are involved in addressing sexual violence (Ogunode et al., 2024). One of the key NGOs is the **Mirabel**

Centre. Established in 2013, the Mirabel Centre is a sexual assault referral center. It provides free medical care, counseling and legal support to survivors of sexual violence. The center operates under auspices of Partnership for Justice, a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting human rights and providing access to justice (Mirabel Centre, 2024). Another NGO is Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF). Founded in 2016, WARIF focuses on reducing prevalence of sexual violence in Nigeria through preventive measures and direct support services. The organisation operates a rape crisis center that offers medical care, forensic examinations, and counseling services. WARIF conducts educational programs and community outreach to raise awareness about sexual violence and promote behavioral change (WARIF, 2024).

Project Alert on Violence against Women is an important NGO in Lagos that fights against sexual violence. Founded in 1999, Project Alert helps survivors by offering counseling, legal support, and temporary shelter at Sophia's Place. The organisation also works to change laws and raise public awareness about sexual violence. They run educational programs, reach out to communities, and provide training workshops to create a supportive environment for survivors and to prevent sexual violence. Project Alert aims to promote gender equality and justice in Lagos (Project Alert, 2024).

On the governmental side, the Lagos State **Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team** (DSVRT) was established by the Lagos State Government, DSVRT is a multi-disciplinary team that coordinates responses to domestic and sexual violence cases. The team has representatives from various government agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, the police force, and health services. It offers a range of services, including legal aid, medical care, and counseling. They also run public awareness campaigns and provide training to law enforcement and judicial personnel to improve the handling of sexual violence cases (Udombana, 2019). To add on the above, the Lagos State **Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation** (WAPA) is another government agency in the fight against sexual violence. WAPA provides support

to women and children who are victims of sexual violence giving services such as temporary shelter, legal assistance and vocational training. The ministry also works to empower women economically, thereby reducing their vulnerability to sexual violence (Obagboye and James, 2022).

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study adopted a phenomenological design to describe lived experiences of individuals affected by sexual violence. Phenomenological research focuses on understanding how people experience and interpret a particular phenomenon in their own lives (Casey, 2009). Phenomenology was suited for this study as it aims to capture the essence of how sexual violence impacts women in Lagos, providing rich, detailed insights into their personal experiences and the meanings they attribute to these experiences (Burton, 2000). According to Friesen (2023), qualitative research prioritises individual interpretations and experiences, making phenomenology a fitting choice for exploring the nuanced realities of survivors. The study employed qualitative interviews to answer the research questions well. This method was selected because it enables the researcher to gather detailed, context-rich participant data. Interviews are well-suited for exploring personal perspectives and participants' experiences with sexual violence (Nigar, 2020). The research aimed to capture the depth of their experiences, challenges, and views on support strategies by engaging directly with stakeholders.

3.2 Participants

Following the research questions, it was important to identify participants who have direct experience in addressing sexual violence. I interviewed staff from three key organisations for this study: the Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA), the Mirabel Centre, and Project Alert on Violence against Women. These organisations were selected because they were easily accessible and provide services for survivors of sexual violence and are involved in addressing related challenges. Each organisation gives different forms of sup-

port: legal, medical, counseling, and advocacy, and their staff members possess firsthand knowledge of the successes and challenges of their interventions.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency established by the Lagos State Government, is a multi-disciplinary agency that coordinates responses to domestic and sexual violence cases. It includes representatives from various government agencies, such as the Ministry of Justice, the police, and health services (Udombana, 2019). I chose the DSVVA due to its approach to managing sexual violence cases. The agency involvement in legal aid, medical care, counselling, and public awareness campaigns provides a good view of how sexual violence is addressed at a systemic level. Interviews with DSVVA staff were expected to provide an understanding of the challenges of inter-agency coordination and the impact of public awareness efforts on survivor support and service delivery. *The Mirabel Centre* is a prominent sexual assault referral center offering free medical care, counseling, and legal support to survivors of sexual violence. It operates under the Partnership for Justice, a non-profit organisation dedicated to human rights and access to justice. It was selected because of its focus on providing immediate support to survivors. The center's direct interaction with survivors and its role in facilitating medical, legal, and psychological support make it a valuable source of information on the practical challenges faced by survivors. Interviews with staff at the Mirabel Centre were expected to reveal details about the survivor experience, including barriers to accessing support and the effectiveness of the services provided. *Project Alert* provides counseling, legal support, and temporary shelter through Sophia's Place. The organisation also engages in advocacy, legal reform, and public awareness efforts. It was chosen due to its extensive experience in advocacy, public education, and direct support services. Interviews with Project Alert staff aimed to establish the advocacy efforts and the practicalities of providing shelter and legal support to survivors.

Practical considerations influenced my selection. Due to logistical constraints, such as limited time and accessibility, I chose organisations that were both willing to participate and easy to access within Lagos. I also prioritised

institutions that provide a variety of support services to give a wider understanding of how sexual violence is addressed from different angles (legal, medical, and advocacy). However, other important organisations in Lagos also address sexual violence, such as the Women at Risk International Foundation (WARIF), FIDA Nigeria (International Federation of Women Lawyers) and the Lagos State Gender Advocacy Team (LASGAT). This study did not include these organisations due to these limitations. The exclusion of these groups suggests that the scope of my findings may not fully capture all possible approaches to addressing sexual violence in Lagos. For instance, WARIF provides survivor services like the Mirabel Centre, while LASGAT does advocacy and public awareness, similar to Project Alert. By not including these institutions, my findings may lean more toward the strategies used by the organisations I interviewed rather than offering a complete view of all responses in Lagos. Nonetheless, the chosen institutions could be easily accessed by the researcher.

Regarding the people interviewed, participants were selected based on their direct involvement with sexual violence survivors and their knowledge of the support systems in place. Specifically, I interviewed staff with roles that place them at the center of intervention efforts within their organisations. For example, at the DSVA, I spoke with senior operation officers, legal officers, and field officers. These individuals are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the agency's response to sexual violence cases, coordinating between agencies (such as the Ministry of Justice and the police), and providing direct support to survivors. Including these participants was intentional, as they could give detailed information on inter-agency coordination, the legal process for survivors, and the impact of public awareness campaigns on service delivery.

Similarly, at the Mirabel Centre, I interviewed the program coordinator, who oversees all activities within the center, including medical, psychological, and legal support for survivors. This role is important in understanding the support system provided to survivors and the immediate challenges they face, such as barriers to accessing care. The staff at Project Alert, including

the senior program officer and legal support staff, provided information into the advocacy work done to improve policies and public awareness of sexual violence, in addition to their role in providing temporary shelter and legal support to survivors.

Each interviewee was selected for their expertise and active role in their organisations. This selection ensures that the data I gathered gave a deep understanding of how these organisations function on the ground and how they address the needs of survivors in areas such as legal aid, public education, and direct survivor support.

The interviews conducted helped me address my research questions. Interviews with DSVA staff showed how sexual violence is managed at a systemic level. Conversations with the Mirabel Centre's program coordinator allowed me to understand the experience of survivors, including barriers to accessing services and the medical and legal support provided. The interviews with Project Alert staff gave me an understanding of advocacy and public awareness strategies employed to address sexual violence.

To gain access to these organisations, I initially contacted their public relations and outreach departments, providing an overview of my research and the potential contribution it could make to the understanding of sexual violence interventions in Lagos. In my communication, I emphasised how the study would highlight their work and the challenges they face in supporting survivors. I obtained oral consent from each organisation after several exchanges, where I discussed the scope of my study and assured them of the confidentiality and ethical considerations involved. The staff members were then selected based on their roles in handling day-to-day operations related to sexual violence interventions, ensuring that they had firsthand knowledge relevant to my research questions.

3.3 Data collection procedure

Interviews were used to gather data from participants, with all interviews conducted online due to logistical and scheduling challenges. To gain access, I

initially reached out to the selected organisations' public relations or outreach departments via email and telephone calls, introducing the research project and explaining its relevance to their work. Following this, I engaged in multiple exchanges with the organisations to secure permission for the interviews. Once the organisations consented to participate, they facilitated introductions to the appropriate staff members involved in sexual violence interventions, which allowed me to schedule interviews directly with them. To ensure the identities of the interviewees, the organisations verified the roles and contact details of the individuals I was interviewing, as most were senior staff members or held key operational roles within their institutions. This process assured me that I was speaking with legitimate professionals who had the expertise required for my study.

The data collected was non-numerical, consisting of written and spoken words. The online interview format raised initial concerns about establishing rapport, but I made a concerted effort to create a comfortable atmosphere for open and honest communication (Riley & Chamberlain, 2022). To ease participants into discussing the difficult and sensitive topic of sexual violence, I started each session with informal conversation to help build trust. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions, and each session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Despite the expertise of the interviewees, discussing such a sensitive issue required being careful. Some participants needed time to pause and reflect, given the emotional weight of the subject. I remained flexible with the interview pace, ensuring that the conversations were conducted with empathy and respect for the sensitive nature of the topic.

3.4 Data analysis

I started by familiarising with the collected data; this included reading and re-reading interview transcripts and reviewing documentary evidence. In this phase, initial ideas and potential themes began to emerge. Once I was familiar with the data, then I generated initial codes such as financial constraints, cul-

tural bias, etc. Next, I searched for themes by examining codes and identifying themes. The themes were then reviewed to ensure they reflected the data well – this step involved refining, combining, or discarding some themes. After, a detailed description of each theme was done – explaining what each theme captures and its relationship to research questions with supporting evidence from data.

3.5 Scope and Limitation of Research, and possible practical problems

All interviews were conducted online due to logistical issues; while online interviews were convenient, internet connectivity issues sometimes interrupted the sessions. Also, it was hard to pick up on body language and non-verbal cues, which are important in understanding participants' feelings and reactions. Before the interviews, thorough preparation was done to ensure that the interviewer and participants were familiar with the online tools being used. This included providing clear instructions and offering technical support if needed. Flexibility was maintained in scheduling, allowing time for participants to reconnect if technical issues arose. In addition, interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses and ensure clarity to compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues. Also, follow-up questions were used to investigate participants' responses. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent, and transcripts were reviewed carefully to ensure that any issues arising from online communication were accounted for in the analysis. In addition, only one person from the Mirabel Centre participated in the study because the administration explained that the person was the focal person who could provide the study with the necessary information. She was selected based on her role as the primary contact for information on the study. Despite the limited number, efforts were made to obtain detailed information from the participant by asking open-ended questions and encouraging them to elaborate on their responses. Moreover, some participants from the Domestic and

Sexual Violence Agency were hesitant to answer all the questions due to concerns about the sensitivity of the topics. The researcher established a rapport with the participants by emphasising confidentiality and the importance of their input for the study. This approach aimed to create a more comfortable environment for discussing sexual violence in Lagos State. For questions that remained unanswered or were unclear, follow-up interviews were sought to fill in gaps where possible.

3.6 Ethical choices, political and positionality

My view posited that women lived in an unequal community, experiencing multiple oppressive and repressive practices. My decision to conduct this research on sexual violence against women in Lagos State was influenced by my background and personal experiences. Growing up in a community where gender-based violence was common, I witnessed the devastating impact it had on women's lives. This personal connection to the issue fueled my commitment to understanding sexual violence in Lagos State. As a researcher, I recognised that my perspective was shaped by my upbringing, experiences, and the cultural context in which I lived. I aimed to approach this research with empathy due to the complexities of the experiences of women who had faced sexual violence. Throughout the research, I adhered to ethical principles to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of all participants were protected. I treated all participants with respect, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. I clearly explained the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and potential risks and benefits. I also respected the autonomy of all participants by ensuring they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Their decision to participate or not was fully respected. In addition, I aimed to maximise the benefits of the research while minimising any potential harm. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, I was mindful of the emotional and psychological well-being of participants. To protect their privacy, I anonymised all data by removing any identifying information. I secured all collected data, and in

cases where participants provided oral consent, their consent and any interviews were securely recorded with access restricted solely to myself to uphold confidentiality. I obtained informed consent from each participant by ensuring they understood the purpose of my research, their role, and their rights.

Chapter 4

4.1 Activities undertaken by NGOs and government agencies to support survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State

This chapter draws on primary data collected through fieldwork to examine the roles of non-governmental organisations and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State. The study explores how these entities support survivors and the specific measures they implement to combat sexual violence. Also, it aims to recommend strategies for improving responses to this critical issue. The chapter focuses on how the actions and responsibilities of NGOs and government agencies are influenced by the prevalence of sexual violence against women in Lagos State.

Sexual violence is a pervasive issue affecting individuals across various demographics especially women and children. Participants in this study understood sexual violence as a range of harmful acts such as rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual exploitation. For example, Emek (Senior operation officer, male, DSVA) established that, “sexual violence is not limited to physical acts like rape but also includes harassment and exploitation.” Project Alert, an organisation dedicated to combating violence against women, handles numerous cases that reflect this diversity. Adetoun (senior program officer, female, Project Alert), noted that the organisation deals with various violence-related cases including domestic violence, economic abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual violence, with a particular prevalence of child sexual abuse. Project Alert deals with various types of violence including domestic and sexual violence as Adetoun (senior program officer, female, Project Alert) explained when interviewed, “We handle cases related to violence against women, including physical, economic, emotional, and sexual abuse.” This shows that Project Alert is committed to addressing different forms of domestic violence. In addition, Funke (program assistant officer, female, Project Alert), mentioned that more people are becoming aware of these issues. She said, “Sexual violence is more common now than before, but more people

are informed about its harmful effects.” Chioma (Surveillance team officer, female, Project Alert), noted that their organisation mainly deals with sexual and domestic violence. She said, “The most frequent cases we encounter include sexual and domestic violence.” Ayomide (support staff-legal, female, Project Alert) added that child sexual abuse is a major concern in their work. She said, “Most of the sexual violence cases here involve child sexual abuse, but it is decreasing due to increased awareness.”

Mirabel also focuses on a range of sexual violence and provide direct support to survivors including medical and psychological care with the aim of helping survivors recover. While DSVF focuses on both domestic and sexual violence. They offer support services like counseling, legal assistance, and emergency shelter for survivors. Their work shows a commitment to addressing all aspects of violence and helping survivors rebuild their lives.

Funke (Program Assistant Officer, female, project Alert), another participant, pointed out that while sexual violence is more rampant now compared to previous years, there has been a rise in public awareness about its harmful effects. This increased awareness is partly due to the efforts of organisations like Project Alert which engage in sensitisation and education campaigns. As more people become informed, they are more likely to report incidents causing to a reduction in such cases over time. However, Chioma (Surveillance team officer, female, Project Alert), another respondent, noted that;

“.... Sexual violence continues to be widespread in Lagos and much work remains to be done to address the root causes and give adequate support for survivors.”

Ayomide (support staff-legal, female, Project Alert), a participant, pointed out that, a 12-year-old girl was repeatedly sexually assaulted by a neighbor who threatened her to prevent her from speaking out. The case only came to light when the girl confided in a teacher during a sensitisation session organised by Project Alert. This reveals that awareness programs in schools and communities encourage victims to speak up and seek help. Another case involved a young woman who was harassed at her workplace by a senior colleague. Despite initially feeling powerless, she reported the harassment after

attending a workshop on sexual harassment organised by a local NGO. This case shows that education and empowerment in combating sexual violence, more especially in environments where power structures make it difficult for victims to come forward.

Legal frameworks

In this study, three participants discussed the role of legal frameworks in addressing sexual violence, each bringing unique insights based on their specific roles and experiences within different organisations. Tunde, a male case officer at the Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA), explained strong laws that hold offenders accountable. He said, “Legal frameworks ensure there are clear laws against sexual violence and that offenders are held accountable. [...] Without strong laws, providing survivors with justice is difficult.” This statement shows the view that strong legal frameworks are foundational to preventing sexual violence. However, Tunde also noted that even when these laws exist, survivors encounter bureaucratic challenges that delay justice – diminishing their confidence in the system’s effectiveness. Lagos State has strong laws against sexual violence, but inadequate enforcement remains a major issue, allowing many perpetrators to evade accountability. This concurs with Zielinski et al. (2021), who argue that a legal framework is only effective when adequately enforced and supported by accessible legal aid.

Femi, a legal officer at DSVA, expanded on this point, saying that,

Even with good laws in place, they are not being enforced. Survivors need to see that the legal system works and that perpetrators are prosecuted.

His perspective pointed out that legal frameworks risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive in delivering justice to survivors without consistent enforcement. Femi’s comments also align with feminist legal critiques, which argue that patriarchal biases and procedural delays affect the criminal justice system’s ability to serve survivors well (Syombua, 2014).

Marabe, a program coordinator at the Mirabel Centre, talked about how their organisation works with legal professionals to help survivors get the legal support they need. She said, “Our organisation works with legal professionals to provide survivors with the legal assistance they need.” Marabe shows that they provide legal guidance and representation to survivors of sexual violence. The support from the Mirabel Centre helps survivors feel more confident and able to take action. Organizations like the Mirabel Centre help survivors by guiding them through reporting crimes, filing cases, and seeking justice. This support makes it easier for survivors to get legal help (Freccero et al., 2011). DSVa and the Mirabel Centre help survivors go through the court process, which is important for reducing the stress and trauma of facing offenders in court. The views from Tunde and Marabe agree with Hegarty et al (2016) who established that court advocacy helps give survivors confidence and power (Zielinski et al., 2021).

Chioma, a surveillance team officer with Project Alert, talked about the advocacy needed to close the gaps that survivors face. She said, “Survivors face barriers in accessing legal support or delays in judicial processes.” Chioma reveals that systemic issues like judicial delays and accessibility barriers create hardship for survivors, making it difficult for them to achieve timely justice. Her organisation helps with advocacy to fix these issues and push for changes that make the legal process faster and easier for survivors. Antonsdottir (2020) explained that delays in legal proceedings create “secondary victimisation,” where survivors experience trauma due to the drawn-out process of achieving justice.

Legal support

Legal support services provided by organisations like the Mirabel Centre, Project Alert, and DSVa are integral to guiding survivors of sexual violence through the legal system. Legal support services include structured counseling, in-depth case updates, in-person representation, and continuous guidance, ensuring survivors are well-prepared and supported in their pursuit of justice. Marabe, a Program Coordinator at the Mirabel Centre, established,

Our legal support begins with counseling where survivors are informed about their rights, the legal process, and what to expect at each stage. We are there every step of the way to make sure they do not feel alone. [Marabe, Program Coordinator, female, Mirabel Centre, interviewed on 31st July].

This aligns with Burns and Sinko (2023) who noted that consistent legal guidance empowers survivors, helping them regain control and confidence through structured support. Similarly, Project Alert provides a number of legal services aimed at demystifying legal proceedings for survivors. Adetoun, a Senior Program Officer at Project Alert, explained that “We provide representation and legal advice and updates on case progress to ensure that survivors understand and feel supported throughout the process” [Adetoun, Senior Program Officer, female, Project Alert, interviewed on 24th July]. Vasiliauskaitė et al. (2023) argued that survivor-focused legal services especially those that ensure open communication and updates improve the experiences of victims within the legal system. Field Officers at DSVa accompany survivors to court and other legal appointments. Femi, a Legal Officer at DSVa, noted,

“Our field officers work with survivors when needed and stand beside them in court to provide practical and emotional support” [Femi, Legal Officer, male, DSVa, interviewed on 22nd July].

Femi’s account of this role exemplifies the concept of “embodied advocacy,” where legal support extends beyond traditional boundaries to encompass presence and advocacy during critical moments in survivors’ legal journeys. Syombua (2014) addressed that legal care including technical legal support and psychological strength makes survivors get justice. Chioma, Project Alert’s Surveillance Team, indicated that,

We have dedicated officers who ensure survivors are updated on every aspect of their cases and are informed of any changes or legal requirements. We believe it is important for them to understand and participate fully” [Chioma, Surveillance Team Officer, female, Project Alert, interviewed on 24th July].

This reflects Parpart (2013), who argues that empowerment through information shows that when survivors are kept informed, they feel a greater sense of agency and participation in their pursuit of justice. In addition, Emek, a Senior Operations Officer at DSVa, explained that,

We start by assessing the survivor's situation and needs, then provide counseling on legal options, potential outcomes, and procedural steps. This includes reviewing case files and working with survivors to prepare documentation and evidence for court. [Emek, Senior Operations Officer, male, DSVa, interviewed on 22nd July].

Emek's description reflects Burns and Sinko (2023) who established that complete preparatory counseling equips victims for legal proceedings and gives them a sense of agency in the judicial process. Another participant, Tunde, a Case Officer at DSVa, added, "One of our roles is to ensure survivors are kept up-to-date with any developments in their cases. We explain legal terms, help them prepare for court hearings, and provide guidance on what to expect" [Tunde, Case Officer, male, DSVa, interviewed on 22nd July]. Survivor-centered approaches that creates understanding by maintaining transparency in communication.

In addition, Titi, a Field Officer at DSVa, said, "We help them feel comfortable to speak when needed." [Titi, Field Officer, female, DSVa, interviewed on 22nd July]. Titi's description of her role points to embodied advocacy (Burns & Sinko, 2023), where a supportive advocate helps mitigate the stress of legal proceedings for survivors. In Project Alert, Ayomide, a Support Staff member specialising in legal aid, elaborated on the importance of clarifying legal rights and processes: "We tell survivors what the legal process involves and the timeline for their cases. Survivors feel uncertain, and our role is to help them feel confident in telling their story" [Ayomide, Support Staff - Legal, female, Project Alert, interviewed on 24th July]. This focus on grounding survivors through knowledge and clarity is consistent with Antonsdottir (2020) who notes that survivor-centered legal services improve trust and confidence, especially when survivors are well-informed. I believe that legal support gives survivors a sense of control and hope. Mirabel Centre

and Project Alert try to offer legal help alongside emotional support, but they struggle with limited resources. The DSVA aims to fill those gaps by providing legal advice and representation. However, the slow legal processes and inconsistent law application still make it tough for survivors, who often do not fully understand their rights. Without addressing these barriers, survivors feel powerless even when legal help is available.

Capacity building

Capacity building requires improving skills, knowledge, and resources of individuals and organisations to respond well to sexual violence. This measure is good for increasing the ability of government agencies to support survivors and implement strong interventions. The data shows four participants discussed the relevance of capacity building in addressing sexual violence. Emek (senior operation officer, male, DSVA, 22nd July): “At DSVA, training sessions are held regularly to ensure that staff handle the sensitive nature of sexual violence cases well” [Emek, senior operation officer, male, DSVA, 22nd July]. This training includes understanding trauma responses and providing appropriate emotional support to survivors. In addition, Tunde also noted that: “It is not just about training [...] giving organisations resources they need to operate well. Without adequate funding and infrastructure, even the best-trained staff cannot perform their roles properly” [Tunde, case officer, male, DSVA, 22nd July].

A participant explained how DSVA facilitates learning:

Our institution shares best practices among its staff [...] to help everyone in supporting survivors to learn from each other and improve their approaches. [Bolanle, field officer, female, DSVA, 22nd July].

DSVA conducts joint workshops and training sessions with other organisations to exchange strategies and refine their methods to improve response to sexual violence. Marabe (program coordinator, female, Mirabel Centre, 31st July) noted: “At Mirabel Centre, new staff are trained and give professional development to existing staff to keep up with the latest practices in sexual violence response.” However, Chioma (surveillance team officer, fe-

male, Project Alert) pointed out a challenge: “Some staff at Project Alert reported that despite initial training, there is limited follow-up to ensure that new skills are being applied well in their work with survivors” Antonsdottir. (2020) showed that improving skills and resources of service providers is good for improving quality of support for survivors.

Education campaigns

Education campaigns involve spreading awareness and providing information about sexual violence to prevent it and support survivors. These campaigns cover a range of topics, from defining sexual violence and consent to promoting healthy relationships, legal rights, and survivor support services. Each organisation customises its campaigns for specific audiences using various channels to reach different demographic groups across Lagos State. At the Mirabel Centre, campaigns focus on correcting common misconceptions about sexual violence and its legal ramifications. Marabe, the Program Coordinator, explained the content of these campaigns:

We educate the public on what constitutes sexual violence, aiming to dispel myths that lead to victim-blaming and harmful stereotypes. Our messages tell them that sexual violence is a crime, not a result of the victim’s behavior or appearance. [Marabe, Program Coordinator, female, Mirabel Centre, interviewed on 31st July].

Through workshops and informational materials, the Mirabel Centre reaches different groups, including schools, community centers, and local women’s organisations. Morrison (2005) suggest that tackling myths and stereotypes reshape public attitudes and build a supportive environment for survivors. DSVA’s campaigns educates younger audiences on consent and healthy relationships and available support services. Sade, a Field Officer at DSVA, said,

For youth, we talk about consent and what respectful relationships look like. For adults, we focus more on the legal aspects – what sexual violence laws mean and the types of help survivors can access” [Sade, Field Officer, female, DSVA, interviewed on 22nd July].

These campaigns are implemented through community visits, workshops, and educational sessions in schools, ensuring that important messages about respect, consent, and support are accessible to young audiences. Ayomide, Support Staff - Legal at Project Alert, established the use of media channels to widen the campaign's reach:

We use social media, radio, and television to discuss sexual violence and support options, engaging people who might not attend in-person events. [Ayomide, Support Staff - Legal, female, Project Alert, interviewed on 24th July].

Through these platforms, the organisations share short videos, survivor stories, and discussions with legal experts, reaching thousands of people in Lagos State. This media strategy is good for multi-platform campaigns in areas where different media use is common (Dwihadiah & Stephanie, 2022). Funke, a Program Assistant Officer, explained,

We provide clear information on where survivors can get help, including emergency contacts, safe places, and legal aid options. We want the public to know there are places that offer immediate support” [Funke, Program Assistant Officer, female, Project Alert, interviewed on 24th July].

Funke's perspective shows that disseminating practical information builds awareness of available services and connects survivors with urgent resources. In addition, DSVA collaborates with local schools, health clinics, and community leaders to extend its campaign reach. Femi, a Legal Officer at DSVA, described that,

Working with schools and community leaders allows us to reach people who trust these local figures. This way, our messages about sexual violence and survivor support are more likely to be taken seriously and shared widely” [Femi, Legal Officer, male, DSVA, interviewed on 22nd July].

This ensures that education campaigns are integrated into community routines, using trusted voices to strengthen campaign messages. This is supported by Burns and Sinko (2023) who established that public education reduces sexual violence by increasing knowledge about prevention and changing attitudes. I have observed that these organizations run education

campaigns that focus on teaching people about consent, legal rights, and available support services. Their goal is to create a well-informed public and a supportive environment for survivors. Using workshops, media outreach, and partnerships with local communities ensures their messages reach different groups of people.

Medical and psychosocial support

Medical and psychosocial support is a care given to survivors of violence covering medical treatment and emotional support as supported views from four participants (Marabel, Femi, Funke, Ayomide). Organisations such Mirabel, Project Alert, and the DSVa offer this kind of care to help survivors recover and rebuild their lives. Mirabel center offers medical and psychosocial services to survivors of sexual violence. According to one participant,

“We ensure that survivors receive immediate medical attention including treatment for physical injuries, and preventive measures against sexually transmitted infections.” [Marabe, program coordinator, female, interviewed on 31st July]

This focus on medical support aligns with Abiddin et al. (2022) who established that immediate medical care reduces physical impacts of sexual violence and prevents long-term health complications. However, Mirabel goes beyond physical treatment by providing psychological counseling and therapy. A participant noted, “Survivors often carry deep emotional scars. Our therapy sessions are designed to help them process their trauma, rebuild their self-esteem, and regain control of their lives.” [Marabe, program coordinator, female, interviewed on 31st July] Forkey et al. (2021) argued that psychological care is essential for trauma recovery as it helps survivors rebuild their sense of safety and self-worth. I understand that the approach of Mirabel Centre of giving immediate medical care helps survivors regain their self-esteem and control over their lives.

Similarly, A staff member from Project Alert was quoted,

We approach each case with the understanding that trauma affects the whole person. Our services are not just about treating injuries but also about providing a safe space where

survivors speak openly about their experiences and begin to heal emotionally.” [Funke, Program assistant officer, female, Project Alert]

Matheson et al. (2020) found that providing a safe and supportive environment is vital for the psychological recovery of trauma survivors. The use of both individual and group counseling at Project Alert allows survivors to share their stories and find support within a community, a strategy that aligns with McNamara et al. (2021) who noted that communal support reduces feelings of isolation and promoting emotional healing.

A participant from DSVa stated,

We work closely with hospitals and mental health professionals to ensure that survivors receive the care they need. Our goal is to create a coordinated response that addresses both the physical and emotional needs of survivors.” [Femi, legal officer, male, DSVa]

Femi’s statement shows that different services are coordinated to address full spectrum of a survivor’s needs. Vasiliauskaitė et al. (2023) argued that integrated services are effective in addressing complex needs of sexual violence survivors. In addition to direct services, these organisations also engage in follow-up care to monitor the progress of survivors. A participant explained, “Healing is a long-term process [...] We stay in touch with survivors to ensure they are doing well and to provide support as they continue their recovery journey.” [Ayomide, Support Staff – Legal, Female, Project Alert] This is supported by Zielinski et al. (2021), who found that ongoing support prevents relapse into trauma symptoms.

Sensitisation efforts

Another cluster of activities carried out by NGOs and government agencies to address sexual violence against women is sensitisation efforts including workshops and school positive behaviour programs. These are aimed at educating the public about sexual violence and its impacts through campaigns, workshops and public education programs designed to inform people and

change attitudes toward sexual violence. The goal is to create a more supportive community which helps support survivors. From the data six participants discussed the sensitisation efforts carried out by organisations. One participant said, “Our organisation runs educational workshops and awareness campaigns to inform people about sexual violence.” [Bisola, field officer, female, DSVA, 22nd July] This reveals that the organisation is working to educate the public and raise awareness.

A participant shared her thoughts on their education campaigns that,

Our public education campaign efforts explain what sexual violence is, its types such as rape, harassment, and assault so that people know what counts as such acts. The campaigns also focus on how sexual violence affects survivors physically, emotionally and mentally. A big part of the message is about consent, explaining that it must be clear, voluntary, and ongoing and cannot be given under pressure. The campaigns also provide information on how to report sexual violence, including where to go for help, hotlines to call, and legal options. [Omotola, field officer, female, Project Alert, 24th July]

Also, workshops teach people how to recognise warning signs of abuse, understand abusive relationships, and safely step in if they see inappropriate behavior. Project Alert trains community members; teachers, healthcare workers and police on how to support survivors by understanding trauma and responding with empathy. At DSVA, the programs of legal rights of survivors, how to report sexual violence, and the legal process involved are taught to the public. Workshops at Mirabel Center focus on advocacy efforts to improve policies and support systems for survivors. Mirabel Center uses school programs to help children and young adults learn about consent, healthy relationships, and staying safe from a young age. Their community outreach programs involve local meetings and activities that bring people together to discuss sexual violence and how to prevent it. These methods engage different groups in the community and spread awareness on how to stay safe and support others.

Tunde (Case Officer, Male, DSVA) added, “Public campaigns reach a wide audience [...] but they also need to be continuous to have a lasting impact.” Their comments suggest that sensitisation efforts are important for changing attitudes but need to be sustained to be truly effective. Participants also talked about the challenges in implementing sensitisation efforts. Chioma (surveillance team officer, female, Project Alert) mentioned, “Reaching all segments of the population is difficult especially in rural areas.” This indicates that there are obstacles in making sure that sensitisation messages reach everyone who needs to hear them. Armistead et al. (2021), public education changes attitudes and reduces the stigma surrounding sexual violence. In addition, Schneider and Hirsch (2020) argued that consistent public education is necessary for creating lasting change. The feedback from participants shows that sensitisation efforts are valued and have a positive impact because sustained education makes a meaningful difference in supporting survivors.

Emergency shelter

Emergency shelters are vital resources that provide immediate, protected accommodation for survivors of sexual violence who must escape unsafe environments. These shelters serve as temporary, confidential spaces where survivors recover and access essential support services. Participants established the role of these shelters and the support they provide. At DSVA, Femi, a Legal Officer, said, “Our shelters offer more than just a safe place to stay. Survivors access legal support, counseling, and help with finding more permanent housing. We do not set strict time limits; rather, we work with each individual to ensure they have the resources they need for a fresh start” [Femi, Legal Officer, male, DSVA, 22nd July]. This approach aligns with Setyaningsih (2023), who highlights the need for adaptable stay durations in shelters to allow survivors sufficient time for emotional recovery and practical planning.

Confidentiality around shelter locations is strictly maintained to ensure survivors’ security. Emek, a Senior Operations Officer at DSVA, shared,

“Only authorised personnel know the location of our shelters. This is important for protecting survivors from potential harm.” [Emek, Senior Operations Officer, male, DSVa, 22nd July]. Burns and Sinko (2023) affirm this practice, noting that confidentiality is a foundational element in creating safe spaces, as it helps prevent further exposure to threats among survivors. For survivors with children, emergency shelters also provide support in integration. Funke, a Program Assistant Officer at Project Alert, explained, “We help children adjust by enrolling them in new schools, making the transition less disruptive for them. It is important that they continue learning and have a sense of normalcy.” [Funke, Program Assistant Officer, female, Project Alert, 24th July]. This approach reflects the findings of Walsh (2007), who argue that facilitating stability for children is essential in shelter services, as it provides mothers and children with a foundation to rebuild their lives.

Shelters also address the needs of working survivors by assisting with employment-related transitions. Bolanle, a Field Officer at DSVa, elaborated, “We help survivors manage employment issues, whether they need support in requesting leave or finding a new job closer to their temporary shelter. Maintaining job security is essential for many women, so we work to ease that burden” [Bolanle, Field Officer, female, DSVa, 22nd July].

In addition, Ayomide, Support Staff - Legal at Project Alert said, “We coordinate with other support services so that survivors have a place to stay and access to healthcare, legal aid, and counseling. This comprehensive approach is what truly makes a difference in their recovery” [Ayomide, Support Staff -Legal, female, Project Alert, 24th July]. Setyaningsih (2023) found that shelters often struggle with constraints and limitations. Many survivors of sexual violence have access to shelters only for a limited period while more permanent solutions are sought. Once this period ends, the transition involves finding alternative housing and integrating survivors into the community. Confidentiality about the shelter’s location is maintained through strict protocols to ensure the safety of the survivors. For those with children, efforts

are made to integrate them into new schools to minimise disruption, and employed women face the difficult decision of leaving their jobs to ensure their safety.

4.2 Challenges NGOs and government agencies face in supporting survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State

One of the questions posed during interview session involved identifying the challenges the institutions face in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State. The responses emerged included three key themes such as: patriarchal norms, delays in legal processes and resource constraints.

Patriarchal norms

During interviews, participants expressed that patriarchal norms are one of the main challenges institutions face in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State. These norms, which are deeply embedded in community beliefs, influence how survivors are treated and discourage them from reporting incidents of sexual violence. Chioma, *a Surveillance Team Officer at Project Alert*, explained how community and family pressures discourage survivors from coming forward:

Convincing survivors to come forward is not easy.
Many are held back by societal pressure and family interference.

Chioma's observation indicates that the emphasis of society on family reputation over justice prevent survivors from seeking the help they need. She noted that these influences lead survivors to silence due to a fear of shame or being blamed. As Koepke (2024) explains that societal stigma around sexual violence results in victim-blaming and this isolates survivors – limiting their access to justice.

Further elaborating on this issue, Bolanle, a Field Officer at DSVA, described the intense pressure from families to prioritise family honour over personal justice. She explained,

We encounter cases where families push survivors to drop their cases for the sake of 'family honour.'
It is a constant battle between the survivor's needs and societal expectations.

Bolanle comment shows the emotional toll that survivors endure, torn between their personal need for justice and the emphasis of the community

on silence to “preserve family honour.” This concurs with Burns and Sinko (2023), who found that patriarchal values contribute to low reporting rates and the stigmatisation of survivors, leaving them vulnerable and unsupported. From these examples, we see that institutional efforts to support survivors are challenged by the need to meet complex societal expectations. The impact of patriarchal norms discourages survivors from seeking justice and also shapes the approach institutions must take.

Delays in legal processes

Delays in the legal system were highlighted by multiple participants as a barrier in addressing sexual violence cases, prolonging the trauma of survivors and resulting in frustration and despair. Participants reported that cases take months or even years to progress, leaving survivors feeling demoralised and questioning the attainability of justice. Ayomide, *a Legal Support Staff member at Project Alert*, described that these delays affect emotional well-being of survivors,

Even though we have supportive laws, court cases drag on for years. This delay adds to the trauma of survivors, and families or friends interfere, trying to get the survivor to settle or give up.

Ayomide understands that the prolonged process extends their distress and also opens the door for external interference. According to Ayomide, families pressure survivors to drop cases or settle, prioritising perceived social harmony over justice. Antonsdottir (2020) also indicates that prolonged legal procedures lead to “secondary victimisation,” where survivors experience additional trauma and an increasing sense of injustice. Femi, *a Legal Officer at DSV*, provided further on the psychological impact of slow legal proceedings on survivors. He observed that

When survivors do not see quick results in their cases, they lose faith in the system. The justice process is so slow that many stop pursuing it altogether.

Femi’s perspective explains survivor disengagement, as delays cause them to abandon their pursuit of justice entirely. This agrees with Engleton

(2024) who argue that delayed legal outcomes erode trust in the justice system, making survivors likely to discontinue their cases. Institutions like DSVa and Project Alert try to navigate these delays, but the systemic issues in the legal system remain a major barrier to achieving justice. Antonsdottir (2020) noted that specialised “fast-track” legal processes for cases of sexual violence could reduce delays and reduce trauma experienced by survivors.

Limited resources

Limited funding, staff shortages, and logistical constraints were identified by participants as a challenge that NGOs and government agencies face in providing support to survivors. These challenges affect everything from legal aid to psychosocial services. Omotola, *a Field Officer at Project Alert*, explained the extent of financial constraints, stating,

We do not have enough funds to cover all support aspects,
from legal aid to psychosocial care.

Omotola’s perspective shows how financial limitations restrict the scope of services available to survivors, with support focused on only the most critical needs due to budgetary constraints. According to True and Tanyag (2018), insufficient funding hinders NGOs’ ability to deliver complete support. Marabe, *the Program Coordinator at Mirabel Centre*, further explained how these financial challenges affect daily operations: “We try our best, but the resources are stretched thin.” Marabe described how the increasing number of cases overwhelms these institutions, leaving staff with limited resources to address a growing demand. This shortage of resources results in gaps in essential services, which cause delays in case handling and reduce the quality of care survivors receive. This concurs with findings from Abiddin et al (2022), who observed that NGOs struggle to keep up with service demands due to limited funding and limited staff, impacting service delivery.

In addition to funding shortages, staffing limitations further strain service provision. Funke, *a Program Assistant Officer at Project Alert*, expressed concern about how underfunding affects staff capacity: “Our staff are dedicated but without enough funding, it is hard to provide the level of care that

survivors need.” Funke establishes that, despite the dedication of staff members, limited resources hinder their ability to meet both the emotional and practical needs of survivors. This shows the resource strain that NGOs face, as staff members are overwhelmed by caseloads and are unable to deliver the sustained care survivors require.

Marabe added that even with donor support, funding still falls short of covering all costs, sharing that, “Our centre handles many cases, but we are limited by finances. While our donors help, sometimes we cannot manage and what we do is to lobby for more donations [...] but it takes time, making services to survivors slow.” This quote reveals the time-consuming nature of seeking additional funds, which cause delays in service delivery, leaving survivors without timely support. Vasiliauskaitė et al. (2023) recommend that increased funding and investment in staffing are essential to meet rising demands. In addition, limited resources affect institutions’ capacity to respond to emergencies well. Chioma, *a Surveillance Team Officer at Project Alert*, explained how lack of financial resources and logistical support limits the field team’s ability to reach survivors in time:

Sometimes, by the time we are able to get to survivors, time has passed. It is frustrating for them, and for us too, because we know they need help right away, but we just do not have enough vehicles or transport allowances to make that happen immediately.

This delay due to logistical constraints means that survivors endure longer wait times for initial support, which sometimes further traumatise them and discourage others from coming forward. Walshe (2020), immediate response times is important in cases of sexual violence as delays lead to survivors experiencing psychological harm and diminished trust in support institutions.

Tunde, *a Case Officer at DSVa*, similarly noted the strain on existing staff due to limited personnel: “We have a few legal officers, and each one handles multiple cases. It becomes overwhelming for us and also for the survivors who have to wait longer for feedback and updates on their cases.”

Here, Tunde establishes that the high caseloads lead to protracted case timelines and limit personal attention each survivor receives. This shows that the capacity of institutions is limited to handle all cases of survivors, as each officer is forced to handle a volume of cases that reduces the quality of engagement. In another way in which limited resources affect advocacy work that is needed to challenge legal delays and societal stigma. Adetoun, a Senior Program Officer at Project Alert, said: *“We want to do more to advocate for faster legal processes and awareness programs to change societal views, but with our current resources, we can only focus on direct survivor support.”* The limited resources mean these institutions only prioritise immediate survivor needs over long-term advocacy which in turn perpetuates the cycles of stigma and delayed justice for survivors.

4.3 Strategies suggested to improve the response to sexual violence against women in Lagos State

This section explores strategies to improve response to sexual violence against women in Lagos State. Three themes were identified: legal policy implementation, increased resources for survivors and improved education.

Legal policy implementation

One of the themes that emerged was legal policy implementation, a strategy which focuses on effective application of laws and regulations designed to address sexual violence. It requires that the legal frameworks are in place, actively enforced and that there is accountability for violations. Five participants discussed legal policy implementation as a strategy to improve response to sexual violence. One of the participants said:

Without proper enforcement, the laws on paper are meaningless. We need to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that survivors see justice being done. [Emek, Senior Operation Officer, Male, DSVAs, 22nd July]

I believe that while effective enforcement of laws is crucial to ensuring justice, it is only part of the solution. Laws, by their nature, come into play after the harm has been done. I think it is essential to couple legal enforcement with preventative strategies. Without such measures, such as public education campaigns and efforts to shift harmful cultural norms, the legal framework will remain insufficient in addressing the root causes of sexual violence. I agree with the idea that prevention must be a priority. No matter how well-enforced, laws alone cannot fully address the problem. With prevention, we reduce the incidence of sexual violence and create a society where these laws are invoked less because fewer acts of violence occur. Another participant added that,

Transparency in how sexual violence cases is handled build public trust in the legal system. Accountability measures are needed to ensure that those who fail to enforce the law are held responsible. [Bolanle, Field Officer, Female, DSVAs, 22nd July]

This reveals that transparency and accountability are key to ensuring that legal policies are well implemented and that survivors get confidence in the justice system. Public trust is important for survivors of sexual violence to come forward and engage with the legal process. Without trust, the system risks alienating those it aims to protect. In addition, another participant stated, “... We are attempting to show the gaps in enforcement of justice in Lagos state.” [Chioma, Surveillance Team Officer, Female, Project Alert, 24th July] This indicates that identifying shortcomings is key in realising a successful legal policy implementation. I believe that this process should involve an evaluation of current legal practices to identify where they fall short and how they can be improved. The Lagos State government should develop strategies to close gaps in the legal responses to sexual violence which are not present.

To add on, another participant explained the need for legal reforms in Lagos state. He stated that, “... legal reforms are necessary to address the evolving nature of sexual violence. [Ayomide, Support Staff – Legal, Female, Project Alert, 24th July]

This shows that legal reforms are necessary to keep up with changes in the landscape of sexual violence and ensure that legal policies remain effective. The study revealed that while legal policies are in place, their implementation is still inadequate for improving the response to sexual violence. Because of inadequate resources, lack of training, and insufficient transparency, the implementation process is hindered. This is supported by Antonsdottir (2020) who showed that enforcement of legal frameworks measures ensures survivors of sexual violence have access to legal assistance.

Increased resources for survivors

The second cluster of strategies to improve response to sexual violence is increased resources for survivors. Participants suggested that individuals affected by sexual violence should be allocated more financial, human, and infrastructural resources by improving access to medical care, counseling, legal assistance, and safe accommodation. One participant during an interview

highlighted that, “More financial resources are needed to ensure that survivors receive care they need. Without sufficient funding, our organisation struggles to give necessary services like medical treatment and psychological support.” [Titi, Field Officer, Female, DSVA, 22nd July] This shows that without enough money, government agencies cannot provide the full range of support services that survivors need. I believe that more resources would help keep these services running and expand them, improving the overall support for survivors.

Another important resource is more trained professionals as a participant noted,

We need more trained staff to handle cases of sexual violence. At DSVA, we handle many victims of sexual violence and all that require manpower and money [...] We also need to train and hire specialists to provide the right kind of support to survivors. [Bolanle, Field Officer, Female, DSVA, 22nd July]

These voices reveal that investing in human resources ensures that survivors receive high-quality care from skilled professionals. The lack of qualified staff affects immediate responses and support survivors receive. Therefore, investing in human resources improves care survivors receive from institutions. A participant, however, was of the view that; “Many support services are overstretched due to limited resources.” [Femi, Legal Officer, Male, DSVA, 22nd July] This points to the need for resource allocation to address gap between demand and availability of support services as, “Survivors need access to well-equipped centers that provide immediate and effective assistance.” [Omotola, Legal Officer, female, Project Alert, 24th July] This shows that improving physical infrastructure is good to offer adequate support to survivors.

In addition, “Survivors need ongoing support, and increased resources ensure that follow-up care is provided through regular check-ins and continued access to counseling services.” [Marabe, Program Coordinator, Female, Mirabel Centre, 31st July] This indicates that sustained financial support is

necessary for continuous assistance to survivors. Another participant established that, "... there is need to fund community organisations that work directly with survivors and provide essential services." [Chioma, Surveillance Team Officer, Female, Project Alert, 24th July] These voices show that increased resources are improve response to sexual violence. Financial support, human resources, infrastructure, and community-based resources ensure survivors receive good care. This is supported by Vasiliauskaite et al. (2023) who argued adequate funding and resources ensure that survivors access necessary care.

Improved education

Improved education is a strategy aimed at improving awareness, knowledge, and skills related to sexual violence among the general public, survivors, service providers, and law enforcement officials. "We need more awareness campaigns to help people understand what sexual violence is and how it affects survivors [...] through this, we can change attitudes and reduce stigma, making it easier for survivors to seek help." [Tunde, Case Officer, Male, DSV A, 22nd July] This reveals that public education shifts societal attitudes associated with sexual violence. These campaigns fit community needs by using familiar stories and local languages. In Lagos, using Yoruba or Pidgin English in radio ads or community meetings makes messages about sexual violence more relatable. Storytelling with local folk tales or real-life testimonials also help the audience connect with the information.

Another form of education should be provided to service providers as highlighted by one of the participants.

Service providers need regular training to stay updated on best practices for handling sexual violence cases [...] This improves the quality of care and ensure that survivors receive appropriate support. [Bolanle, Field Officer, Female, DSV A, 22nd July]

This implies that professional development for service providers leads to supporting survivors well. One participant added that there is need for educational programs in schools, stating, "I believe when we incorporate sexual violence education into school curricula, we can educate young people about

consent and respect. Early education is good for changing future behaviors.” [Chioma, Surveillance Team Officer Female, Project Alert, 24th July] This shows that early education shapes attitudes and prevents sexual violence from occurring in the first place. I believe that involving survivors in school programs through talk shows could help students understand the issue more and creates a commitment to preventing sexual violence from a young age.

Another participant discussed the need for community education, saying,

Community-based education programs empower individuals to recognise and respond to sexual violence. These programs should involve local leaders and organisations to be effective. [Sade, Field Officer, Female, DSVIA, 22nd July]

This voice indicates that local education efforts that engage community members and leaders help address sexual violence. I believe that using trusted local voices in community such as leaders or popular figures helps spread message well. The community seem to accept programs organised by leaders in their communities. Another form of education identified in this study is through educational workshops, “Workshops and seminars on sexual violence provide good information and skills to both survivors and those who support them. These sessions help in understanding the legal and psychological aspects of sexual violence.” [Ayomide, Support Staff – Legal, Female, Project Alert, 24th July] Educational workshops improve skills related to sexual violence, benefiting both survivors and support networks. The study indicates that improved education is good for improving response to sexual violence. If all education programs identified are implemented: public awareness campaigns, training for service providers, school-based education, community programs, and educational workshops; we shall realise change of attitudes and improve responses to sexual violence. Forkey et al. (2021) argued that awareness initiatives contribute to prevention, improve support for survivors, and promote more effective responses to sexual violence.

Chapter 5

5.1 Conclusion

In this study, I present evidence to conclude the roles of NGOs and government agencies in addressing sexual violence in Lagos State. Mirabel Centre helps survivors with immediate medical care and counseling for their emotional wounds, while Project Alert offers similar support. Legal help is also essential, and the DSVA assists survivors of sexual violence with legal issues, challenging unfair gender biases. Education campaigns by Project Alert teach about sexual violence, consent, and respectful relationships, which is important for raising awareness. Emergency shelters, like those run by the DSVA, give survivors a safe place to stay when they are in danger. Mirabel Centre helps survivors with job training and placement, helping them regain control of their lives and futures.

In addition, NGOs and government agencies focus their efforts on: legal frameworks, capacity building, and education campaigns. Mirabel Centre and DSVA provide legal support that helps survivors navigate the justice system and challenge gender biases. DSVA assists with legal representation and advocacy to ensure fair treatment in court. Project Alert improves capacity by providing training to service providers, improving their ability to deliver medical and psychological support. In addition, education campaigns by Project Alert raise awareness about sexual violence, consent, and respectful relationships using local languages and community stories to make the messages more impactful.

In doing their work, NGOs and government agencies face many challenges such as patriarchal norms that discourage reporting, delays in legal processes that prolong trauma, and limited resources that hinder the delivery of care.

To further improve the response to sexual violence against women in Lagos State, the study found three key strategies: legal policy implementation, increased resources for survivors, and improved education. DSVA's efforts to enforce laws and ensure survivors receive justice despite systemic biases.

Increasing resources, such as those provided by Mirabel Centre for medical care and Project Alert for psychological support, helps survivors rebuild their lives with the necessary tools and services. The financial assistance and job placement programs of Project Alert address the economic barriers survivors of sexual violence face. The educational campaigns by Project Alert raise awareness about sexual violence and consent. This agrees with the feminist standpoint theory, which states that advocacy of women's rights challenges patriarchal norms. These strategies demonstrate a commitment to addressing the needs of survivors of sexual violence in a manner that acknowledges their lived experiences.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested;

Mirabel centre should expand its capability by increase staff and resources to meet the high demand for medical care and counselling by survivors of sexual violence. In addition, the centre could partner with local businesses for job training and placement initiatives to help survivors of sexual violence gain independence.

Project Alert should extend its training programs to more police officers, healthcare workers, and social workers to improve the quality of care that survivors receive when seeking help from various services. The institution should also increase its educational outreach by utilising local media and community events. In their initiatives, they should use testimonies from survivors to make impactful campaigns.

While DSVA provides emergency shelter for survivors, expanding the number of shelters would provide more survivors with a safe space when fleeing dangerous situations. This is also important for survivors with children to secure environment during transitions.

The researcher suggests that future research should establish the effect of legal assistance provided by DSVA on achieving justice for survivors of sexual violence in Lagos and how to address systemic gender biases in the legal

system. In addition, research should examine how financial resources are allocated and used by Project Alert and Mirabel Centre. In addition, more research should be done on the contributions of community-based education campaigns in changing attitudes towards sexual violence and improving understanding of consent. Research should investigate how well different types of support (medical, legal, psychosocial) are coordinated among NGOs.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Researcher: Sofunmade Remilekun Bolanle

Working title: The Role of NGOs and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos state, Nigeria

The purpose of this study is to understand the roles of NGOs and government agencies in addressing sexual violence against women. I am inviting you to consider participating in this study to help provide people with important information to help inform on violence against women.

What is involved?

You will be interviewed by me in a really informed and relaxed way which would be just like having a conversation. The conversation will be recorded in audio and the information will be private and your name will not be used in the study. The recording and all the information will be destroyed when my degree is complete. This process will take you 30-45 minutes to complete.

You can withdraw from taking part in this study at any time before the research is complete, without giving a reason and you can ask me any question you have about this study.

Please take your time to think carefully on whether you would like to be involved. It is your choice and there is no problem if you decide it is not for you.

Consent:

I have clearly explained the study purpose and its objectives to the participant, and he/she has understood and consented to participate.

Signature: Date:

(Researcher)

I have clearly understood study purpose and its objectives and voluntarily accepted to participate in the study.

Signature: Date:

(Participant)

Appendix II: Interview Guide Protocol

1. Please tell me about your understanding of violence against women
2. What types of cases do you mostly deal with?
3. What is the situation of sexual violence in this area?
4. Please tell me the role your organisation plays in addressing sexual violence.
5. What activities does your organisation have in place to support survivors of sexual violence?
6. Who are the women that mostly come to you?
7. Which kinds of problems do they have?
8. What challenges do you face in addressing sexual violence against women in Lagos State?
9. How does your organisation ensure the safety of both staff and survivors during service provision?
10. What strategies do you think would be most effective in improving response to sexual violence in this area?
11. What legal frameworks are currently in place to support survivors of sexual violence in Lagos State?
12. What changes to the legal frameworks can be suggested to improve the response to sexual violence against women in Lagos State?
13. Please share any success stories from your organisation's work in supporting survivors of sexual violence
14. How do you engage with survivors of sexual violence to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are addressed?
15. Is there anything else you would like to discuss regarding your organisation's role in addressing sexual violence in this area?

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix III: Study Participants

No.	Pseu- doname	Role	Gen- der	Institution	Date of Inter- view
1	Emek	Senior Operation Of- ficer	Male	DSVA	22nd July
2	Tunde	Case Officer	Male	DSVA	22nd July
3	Titi	Field Officer	Female	DSVA	22nd July
4	Femi	Legal Officer	Male	DSVA	22nd July
5	Bolanle	Field Officer	Female	DSVA	22nd July
6	Chinedu	Field Officer	Male	DSVA	22nd July
7	Bisola	Field Officer	Female	DSVA	22nd July
8	Sade	Field Officer	Female	DSVA	22nd July
9	Olamide	Field Officer	Female	DSVA	22nd July
10	Marabe	Program Coordinator	Female	Mirabel Cen- tre	31st July
11	Adetoun	Senior Program Of- ficer	Female	Project Alert	24th July
12	Funke	Program Assistant Of- ficer	Female	Project Alert	24th July
13	Chioma	Surveillance Team Officer	Female	Project Alert	24th July
14	Ayomide	Support Staff - Legal	Female	Project Alert	24th July
15	Omotola	Field Officer	Female	Project Alert	24th July