

THE



NARRATIVE

A SAAM SPOTLIGHT ON THE INTERSECTION OF
DISPLACEMENT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA



Why This Matters

Each April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month reminds the world that sexual violence is not rare, isolated, or distant, but a pattern that repeats itself in the lives of millions of women and girls across every continent.

Globally, nearly one in three women, an estimated 736 million, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, non-partner, or both, at some point in their lives. Women who experience violence are significantly more likely to face depression, anxiety, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and long-term health complications.

But for forcibly displaced women and girls, this risk multiplies.

Across the world, over 60 million women and girls are forcibly displaced, and studies show that 1 in 5 of them will experience sexual violence. In reality, the figure is likely higher, as many cases are never reported, never documented, and never addressed.

To mark SAAM this year, Global Rights conducted a field survey in April 2025, covering 10 displacement camps across Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, and the FCT. The findings cast a light on the specific and heightened risks faced by displaced women and girls in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, an estimated 3 million people are currently displaced. In these settings, displaced women and girls are both hyper-visible and powerlessly invisible - **visible to those who seek to exploit them, invisible to those tasked with protecting them.**

Sexual violence in displacement settings often takes the form of sextortion, where access to food, firewood, medicine, or basic services is conditioned on sex. Sexual exploitation does not only come from outsiders or armed groups, but also from those tasked with their protection; camp officials, aid workers, security personnel, as well as fellow camp inhabitants.



736 Million

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3 Million

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60 Million

Across the world, over 60 million women and girls are forcibly displaced, and studies show that 1 in 5 of them will experience sexual violence.

Without access to secure shelter, food, water, or health services, women and girls are often forced into impossible choices, and intimate partner violence, survival sex, and child marriage become recurring strategies to navigate life inside the camps.

Voices from the Field

Sexual violence is often the first “welcome”

“Abuse and exploitation happen when new arrivals get into the camp. When trying to navigate life again, other camp inhabitants take advantage of them and exploit them.”

– **Fieldworker, Borno State**

Lack of essential services fuels exploitation

“Lack of basic amenities like water and electricity are forcing young girls to go out to far locations to go search of water at odd hours of the night and getting raped. The survivors’ parents could not afford to take the victims to the hospital for basic care or report to the security operatives due to lack of trust in the system; instead, they resorted to using some quack practices, such as using hot water.”

– **Fieldworker, Borno State**

A pattern of intimate partner violence

“There was a case reported by one of the women in Wassa IDP camp who was beaten by her partner during the last trimester of her pregnancy. She alleged that the abuse led her into labor earlier than her due date. The case was only reported to her religious leader and settled within the community. Other women have also reported the same pattern of violence within this camp.”

– **Fieldworker, FCT**

Key Takeaways from our Field Survey

- 1. Abuse is normalized** – Respondents from 80% of the camps say sexual exploitation is common, yet often hidden beneath silence or shame.
 - Survival sex and intimate partner violence are the most common forms of abuse
 - Girls (50%) and widows/single mothers (20%) are seen as the most vulnerable groups, often due to financial dependence or lack of protection.
 - Psychological trauma is severe, with depression, fear, and social withdrawal being the most common effects reported.
- 2. Medical and mental health support is largely inaccessible** – 60% say medical services for survivors are not accessible, and 70% say mental health support exists but is poorly implemented or inconsistent.
 - Barriers to reporting include:
 - No access to justice (40%)
 - Fear of stigma (30%)
 - Dependence on abuser for basic needs (20%)





What's Next

The stories from Nigeria's displacement camps are symptoms of broader structural gaps. While these voices expose the prevalence of sexual violence, they also highlight the predictability of sexual violence in contexts where displacement meets neglect. Sexual violence must be addressed with urgency, coordination, and survivor-centered care that operate at the intersections of gender, displacement, and security.

That Means

- Prioritizing early-stage interventions when women arrive in camps
- Ensuring access to essential services, especially healthcare and psychosocial support
- Strengthening the accountability and reach of humanitarian protection actors
- Tackling barriers to reporting with community-led strategies
- Creating safe spaces and survivor networks within displacement sites

Global Rights remains committed to collaborating with communities, frontline workers, and institutions to build systems that respond to and actively prevent violence. The urgency is clear, and the responsibility is collective.

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