

NIGERIA SECURITY AND CIVIL DEFENCE CORPS (NSCDC) AND GENDER VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF EBONYI STATE

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Abstract

Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) is a specialized law enforcement agency established for the protection of Nigeria's critical infrastructure and settlement of civil cases including the fight against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria. With specialized Gender Unit and female Squad coupled with key strategic initiatives, it is believed that the Agency is well positioned to respond and prevent Gender based Violence in the country. Based on this, this study seeks to assess NSCDC and gender Violence in Nigeria with focus on Ebonyi State. The objectives of the study include; the assessment of the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in Ebonyi State, role of NSCDC in control and prevention of gender based Violence and to determine challenges faces by this agency in achieving this mandate. In order to achieve these objectives, the paper adopted contents analysis of existing literature on related subject as its methodology while secondary source of data were used. The study is predicted on Feminist Security Theory. The study concludes that there are prevalent of gender Bases violence in Ebonyi state, that there is significant improvement by NSCDC in the control and prevention of Gender Based Violence in the State, and that the Agency has numerous challenges hindering it from significantly achieving expected results, which includes; culture, loose laws on women protection and lack of awareness on process of reporting gender violence among others. The study among other things, recommends; sensitization awareness campaign, Inter-agency collaboration and community engagements to improve response efforts, gender protection laws, improved specialized training, and adequate personnel among others.

Keywords: Gender-Based violence; NSCDC; Inter-agency collaboration; Community Engagements, Ebonyi State.

Introduction

Gender violence, commonly conceptualized within the broader framework of gender-based violence (GBV), constitutes a major violation of human rights and a significant barrier to sustainable development globally. The United Nations defines gender-based violence as harmful acts directed at individuals based on socially ascribed gender differences, encompassing

physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse (UN Women, 2022). In Nigeria, gender violence is deeply embedded in patriarchal norms, socioeconomic inequalities, weak law enforcement mechanisms, and cultural practices that perpetuate silence and impunity.

Nigeria consistently records high prevalence rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and other forms of gender violence. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), over 30% of Nigerian women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence, while reporting rates remain critically low due to stigma, fear of reprisal, and institutional distrust (National Population Commission (NPC & ICF, 2019). These patterns are particularly pronounced in rural and semi-urban states, including Ebonyi State, where poverty, limited access to justice, and entrenched cultural norms intersect, with documented cases of domestic violence, rape, and child abuse reported by NGOs, health facilities, and law enforcement agencies (Action Aid Nigeria, 2021).

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), established under Act No. 2 of 2003 and amended in 2007, is mandated to assist in maintaining public order, protecting lives and property, and supporting internal security operations. Traditionally perceived as an auxiliary security agency, NSCDC's role has expanded to include community-based protection, disaster response, and civil engagement. In recent years, the Corps has increasingly been involved in responding to social crimes, including gender violence, especially at the grassroots level where police presence is limited (Odeyemi, 2018).

Ebonyi State presents a critical case for examining NSCDC's involvement in gender violence response. The state has recorded persistent incidents of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices, often underreported and inadequately prosecuted (UNICEF, 2021). Understanding how NSCDC operates within this context offers valuable insights into the broader challenges of security-sector engagement with gender violence in Nigeria.

Despite the proliferation of security agencies and legal frameworks aimed at protecting vulnerable populations, gender violence continues unabated in Ebonyi State. Reports from civil society organizations indicate underreporting of cases, victim stigmatization, and weak enforcement of protective laws such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act, 2015), which Ebonyi State domesticated in 2018 (CLEEN Foundation, 2020). While the NSCDC is increasingly visible in community security initiatives, questions remain regarding its effectiveness, institutional preparedness, and operational strategies in addressing gender

violence. Existing studies tend to focus on the Nigeria Police Force, neglecting other security institutions like the NSCDC (Aborisade, 2021).

It is against this background that this study assesses the prevalence of Gender Based violence in Ebonyi state and the contribution of Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps in its control and prevention. It equally examines the challenges hindering the Agency in significantly achieving this purpose which is one of its core mandates.

Conceptual Elucidation

Gender violence:

Gender violence, commonly referred to as gender-based violence (GBV), is a multidimensional social, legal, and security problem that encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm inflicted on individuals, particularly women and girls, based on their gender or socially constructed gender roles (WHO, 2013, 2021). The United Nations sees gender-based violence as any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (UN General Assembly, 1993). These concepts emphasize that GBV is not merely a collection of isolated acts of aggression but a systemic phenomenon rooted in unequal power relations, discriminatory social norms, and patriarchal structures that privilege male dominance over women and other marginalized groups.

Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) is a paramilitary organization established to provide security services complementary to the Nigerian Police Force and to protect critical national assets, infrastructure, and the lives and property of citizens (NSCDC, 2020). Its mandates, as stipulated by the NSCDC Act of 2003, include preventing and managing threats to internal security, assisting in disaster management, and maintaining law and order in collaboration with other security agencies. Beyond conventional security roles, the NSCDC is increasingly recognized for its potential involvement in community-level protection, including addressing gender-based violence (GBV), which remains a pervasive challenge in Nigeria. The Corps' structural organization, including specialized units and community policing strategies, positions it to intervene in cases of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-related crimes, especially in states like Ebonyi where socio-cultural norms may perpetuate gender inequities (Okeke, 2021).

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored within the ambit of the Feminist Security Theory. This theory evolved from the research work of feminist scholars in International relations and Security Studies, principally advanced by scholars such as; J. Ann Tickner and Cynthia Enloe as a critical lens for understanding security beyond traditional, state-centric and militarized conceptions.

These scholars argue that orthodox security frameworks prioritize the protection of the state and military power while systematically marginalizing women's experiences and obscuring non-military forms of violence that shape everyday insecurity. Tickner (2001) contends that conventional security thinking is rooted in masculine assumptions that elevate warfare and territorial defense over human well-being, thereby rendering threats such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence invisible within mainstream security discourse. Enloe (2014) further demonstrates how militarization, nationalism, and patriarchal power structures permeate social institutions and normalize gender hierarchies that expose women and girls to sustained forms of violence.

In applying Feminist Security Theory to the study of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and gender violence in Nigeria, particularly in Ebonyi State, the theory shifts analytical focus from conventional law-and-order approaches to a broader evaluation of how security institutions respond to gendered insecurities. The NSCDC, as a paramilitary agency mandated to protect lives, property, and critical infrastructure, plays an important role in community-level security. Feminist Security Theory interrogates whether this role adequately incorporates the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and whether institutional practices recognize such violence as a core security concern. From a feminist perspective, the effectiveness of the NSCDC cannot be measured solely by enforcement outcomes or crime statistics, but also by the extent to which it addresses the structural and cultural factors that enable gender violence.

Within the Ebonyi State context, Feminist Security Theory draws attention to how socio-cultural norms, patriarchal beliefs, and power imbalances influence both the prevalence of gender violence and institutional responses to it. The theory encourages an examination of whether NSCDC personnel are trained to understand the gendered nature of violence, whether survivors are treated with dignity and confidentiality, and whether institutional procedures reinforce or challenge victim-blaming attitudes, hence the appropriateness of this theory to the study.

Methodology

This study specifically adopted qualitative design as well as content analysis to address the prevalence of Gender Based Violence in Ebonyi state and the contribution of Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps in controlling and preventing the violence in the State. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, secondary sources of data were employed to obtain data from relevant publications, journals, books, conference papers, government publications among others, which were analyzed to achieve the mandate of the study. This approach is appropriate as it provides a clear and understanding of the scope and nature of gender based violence and the activities of NSCDC in controlling and preventing the upsurge of the violence in the state and Nigeria in general.

Gender violence in Nigeria

Gender violence in Nigeria, commonly described as gender-based violence (GBV) or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), constitutes one of the most persistent and complex social problems confronting the country. It refers to a wide range of harmful acts perpetrated against individuals predominantly women and girls on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and unequal power relations between men and women. These acts include sexual assault, rape, domestic and intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, psychological and emotional abuse, economic deprivation, coercive control, and other forms of discrimination that undermine personal dignity and human security. In Nigeria, gender violence is not merely a collection of isolated incidents but a systemic phenomenon deeply embedded in cultural norms, patriarchal ideologies, and socio-economic structures that legitimize male dominance and female subordination. According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC, 2018), GBV remains widespread and normalized in many communities due to cultural beliefs, unequal power relations within households, and societal expectations that prioritize silence and family cohesion over justice for survivors. As a result, gender violence cuts across rural and urban settings and affects women and girls irrespective of age, religion, ethnicity, or social class.

The persistence of gender violence in Nigeria is further reinforced by weak institutional responses, poor enforcement of protective laws, and limited access to survivor-centered support services. Although Nigeria has enacted legal instruments such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, enforcement remains uneven across states, and survivors often face

stigma, victim-blaming, fear of retaliation, and lack of confidence in law enforcement agencies (NHRC, 2018). Many incidents of domestic and sexual violence are treated as private or family matters, discouraging formal reporting and enabling perpetrators to evade accountability. Beyond its immediate physical consequences, gender violence produces long-term psychological trauma, reproductive health challenges, and economic dependency, and social exclusion, thereby undermining women's participation in education, employment, and public life. These consequences collectively hinder national development and violate internationally recognized human rights standard to which Nigeria is a signatory, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Gender Base Violence in Ebonyi State

In Ebonyi State, gender violence has historically manifested in both domestic settings and community-based cultural practices, with female genital mutilation (FGM) being particularly prevalent. For decades, FGM was culturally justified as a rite of passage, a means of preserving chastity, or a prerequisite for marriage, despite its severe health, psychological, and social consequences for women and girls. However, recent data indicate notable progress resulting from sustained advocacy, legislative reforms, community sensitization, and coordinated interventions by government institutions and international development partners. The United Nations in Nigeria (2023) reports that the prevalence of FGM in Ebonyi State declined significantly from 43.2% to 20.4% among women aged 15–49, reflecting the positive impact of rights-based and community-driven initiatives such as the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative. Despite this progress, other forms of gender violence such as domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional violence, and economic disempowerment remain prevalent, highlighting the continued influence of patriarchal norms and gender inequality. Consequently, the situation in Ebonyi State mirrors the broader Nigerian experience, where measurable gains in reducing certain harmful practices coexist with persistent structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to the complete eradication of gender violence.

Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and Gender Based Violence in Ebonyi State

The expanded role of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in responding to gender-based violence (GBV) represents a significant institutional shift from its traditional focus on physical security and protection of critical infrastructure to a broader human-security and rights-based orientation. Historically, the mandate of the NSCDC emphasized civil protection,

disaster management, and the safeguarding of public assets; however, the increasing prevalence and visibility of sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria, coupled with national and international pressure to mainstream gender into security governance, necessitated reforms that integrated gender concerns into its operational frameworks. These reforms reflect recognition that GBV constitutes not only a social and moral problem but also a security issue that undermines human dignity, public safety, and sustainable development.

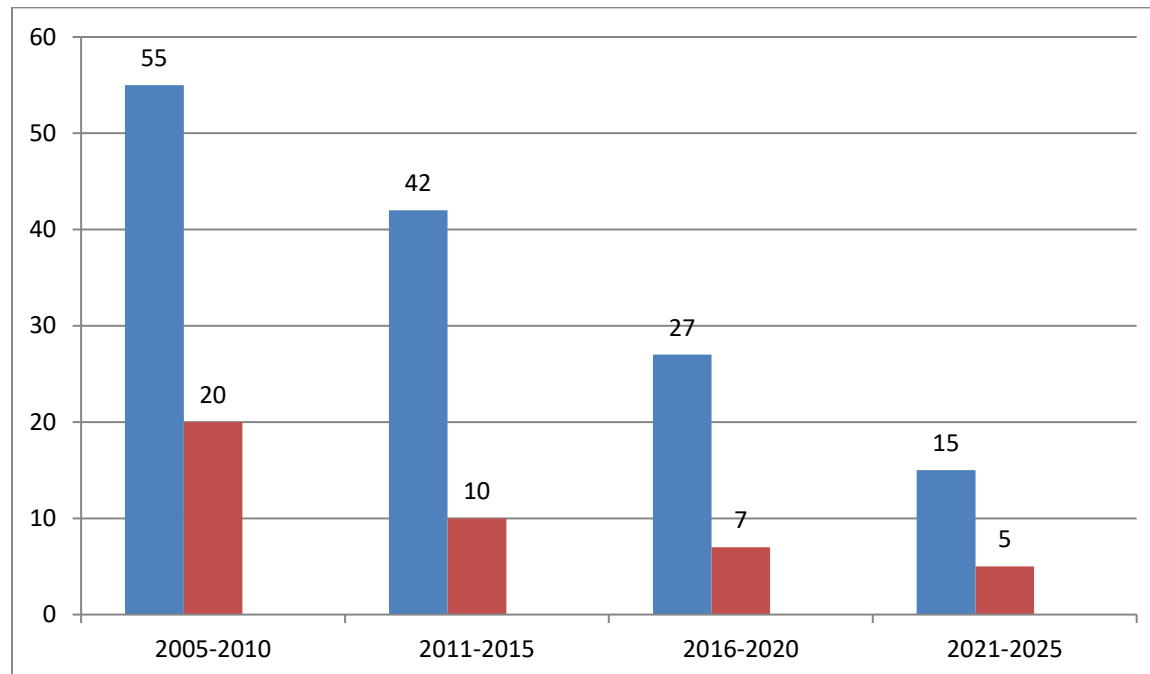
One of the most notable institutional responses to GBV within the NSCDC is the establishment of the Gender Unit in June 2021. The creation of this unit marked a formal acknowledgment of the Corps' responsibility in addressing sexual and gender-based violence beyond conventional crime control. The Gender Unit is structured to function as a first-response mechanism for survivors of SGBV, providing an accessible entry point for reporting incidents and seeking redress. Its functions include the receipt and documentation of complaints, preliminary investigation and evidence management, provision of immediate assistance and protection, and coordination of referrals to relevant agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force, health facilities, legal aid organizations, and social welfare services. By supporting survivors throughout the justice process, the Gender Unit helps to mitigate secondary victimization, which often arises from insensitive handling of cases by security personnel. This initiative aligns with the provisions of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, which emphasizes survivor protection, access to justice, and inter-agency collaboration (NAPTIP, 2022).

It is a known fact that Gender violence in Ebonyi State represents a significant human security challenge that intersects with social structures, cultural norms, and the effectiveness of security institutions such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Although publicly available and disaggregated data on gender-based violence (GBV) cases handled specifically by the NSCDC in Ebonyi State remains limited, recent empirical studies and reports by international and national organizations provide compelling evidence that GBV is widespread and persistent across the state. According to UNFPA Nigeria, women and girls in Ebonyi experience high levels of domestic and intimate partner violence, physical assault, rape and other forms of sexual violence, early and forced marriages, teenage pregnancies, and harmful traditional practices that compromise bodily autonomy and reproductive health (UNFPA Nigeria, 2022; UNFPA Nigeria, 2023). These forms of violence often occur within private and communal spaces, making them less visible to formal security institutions and contributing to chronic under-reporting.

The prevalence of GBV in Ebonyi State is closely linked to structural and contextual factors that heighten women's vulnerability and constrain access to justice. Recent gender assessments indicate that low female literacy rates and limited access to education reduce awareness of legal protections and reporting mechanisms, while widespread poverty and economic dependence reinforce power imbalances within households and intimate relationships (National Bureau of Statistics; NBS, 2022). Cultural norms rooted in patriarchy continue to normalize male dominance and discourage survivors from reporting abuse due to fear of stigma, family pressure, or community backlash. In addition, limited availability of survivor-support infrastructure—such as shelters, forensic medical services, psychosocial counseling, and legal aid—creates significant barriers along the justice and recovery pathway (UNFPA Nigeria, 2023; National Human Rights Commission; NHRC, 2023). These conditions collectively sustain a cycle of silence and impunity, framing GBV in Ebonyi State as both a social problem and a security concern.

Within this environment, the NSCDC holds considerable potential as a complementary security institution capable of addressing GBV through prevention, response, and coordination. At the level of prevention and awareness, the Corps has leveraged on its grassroots presence and statutory role in community safety to conduct sustained sensitization campaigns on gender violence, legal rights of survivors, and the provisions of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act. Recent studies emphasize that community-based education, when delivered by trusted security actors in collaboration with traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and state ministries, can play a critical role in shifting harmful gender norms and increasing reporting behavior (Okenwa & Lawal, 2021; UN Women, 2022). By partnering with non-governmental organizations and faith-based institutions, the NSCDC has been able to contribute to preventive security strategies that prioritize behavioral change and social accountability.

Figure 1: Proportion of Women aged between 15 and 45 years who had experienced Domestic and Sexual Violence in Ebonyi State 2005-2025



Source: Obona & Idam, Oyika & Afudike 2026

From Figure 1 (A) above, this study observes that as at 2005 and 2010, gender based violence against women was very high with domestic violence recording 55 percent of all the women (aged 15 – 49) in Ebonyi State that had experienced one form of physical violence or the other since they were 15 years old. While in the same period, 20 percent of the women within the same age limit had experience of sexual violence.

The proportion of women who had experienced domestic violence reduced to 42 percent between 2011 and 2015, while the proportion of women of the same age bracket that had experienced sexual violence equally reduced from 20 percent to 10 percent.

In 2016 and 2020, the number of women aged between 15 and 49 who had experienced domestic violence further decreased to 27 percent while those who had experienced sexual violence equally reduced to 7 percent.

Furthermore, between 2021 and 2025, the proportion of women aged between 15 and 49 who had experienced one form of domestic violence to another dropped to 17 percent, while those that experienced sexual violence within the same period equally reduced to 5 percent.

The above figures and downwards trend shows that Nigeria security and Civil Defense Corps, has significantly contributed to the control of Gender based Violence in Ebonyi State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that gender-based violence is a serious and pervasive social problem in Ebonyi State, predominantly affecting women and girls and manifesting mainly in domestic and underreported sexual violence. Cultural norms, societal attitudes, and weak reporting mechanisms and law continue to sustain the prevalence of gender violence despite existing legal and institutional frameworks. The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps occupies an important position in the response to gender-based violence due to its statutory mandate and operational presence. The study concludes that NSCDC has contributed meaningfully to reduce gender violence through response and enforcement activities and inter-agency collaboration. However, its effort is still constrained by institutional challenges such as culture, inadequate funding, insufficient manpower, poor logistics, and limited specialized training in gender-sensitive and victim-centered approaches and weak laws.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Sensitization awareness campaign against Gender Based Violence. The government at all level, including Ebonyi state should embark on aggressive sensitization awareness campaign, to educate the citizens about the danger associated with gender violence, and the need to abolish the aspects of the culture that see women as basically under the control of men. It will equally educate the people on processes of reporting cases of gender violence and the action of government in protecting victims against the perceived social stigma which has prevented victims from reporting such cases, which is part of the reasons that it persists in the state.
2. Strengthening Inter-Agency Collaboration and other concerned Groups. There should be established formal and informal coordination frameworks between NSCDC, the Nigeria Police Force, judiciary, social welfare agencies, health institutions, civil society organizations and community leaders where issues of gender violence could be jointly handled, including information, arrest and prosecution of perpetrators. This will give confidence to the victims that their cases would be properly handled without fear, favour or intimidation as has been the case. Regular joint operations, information sharing, referral systems, and case review meetings will enhance comprehensive response and victim protection.

3. Strengthening Institutional Capacity of NSCDC; The Federal Government should increase budgetary allocation to the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps to enhance its capacity to respond effectively to gender-based violence. This will enhance regular and specialized training of personnel in handling gender based violence issues. This is in addition to adequate personnel that should have their presence in all the communities, coupled with provision of operational logistics.

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