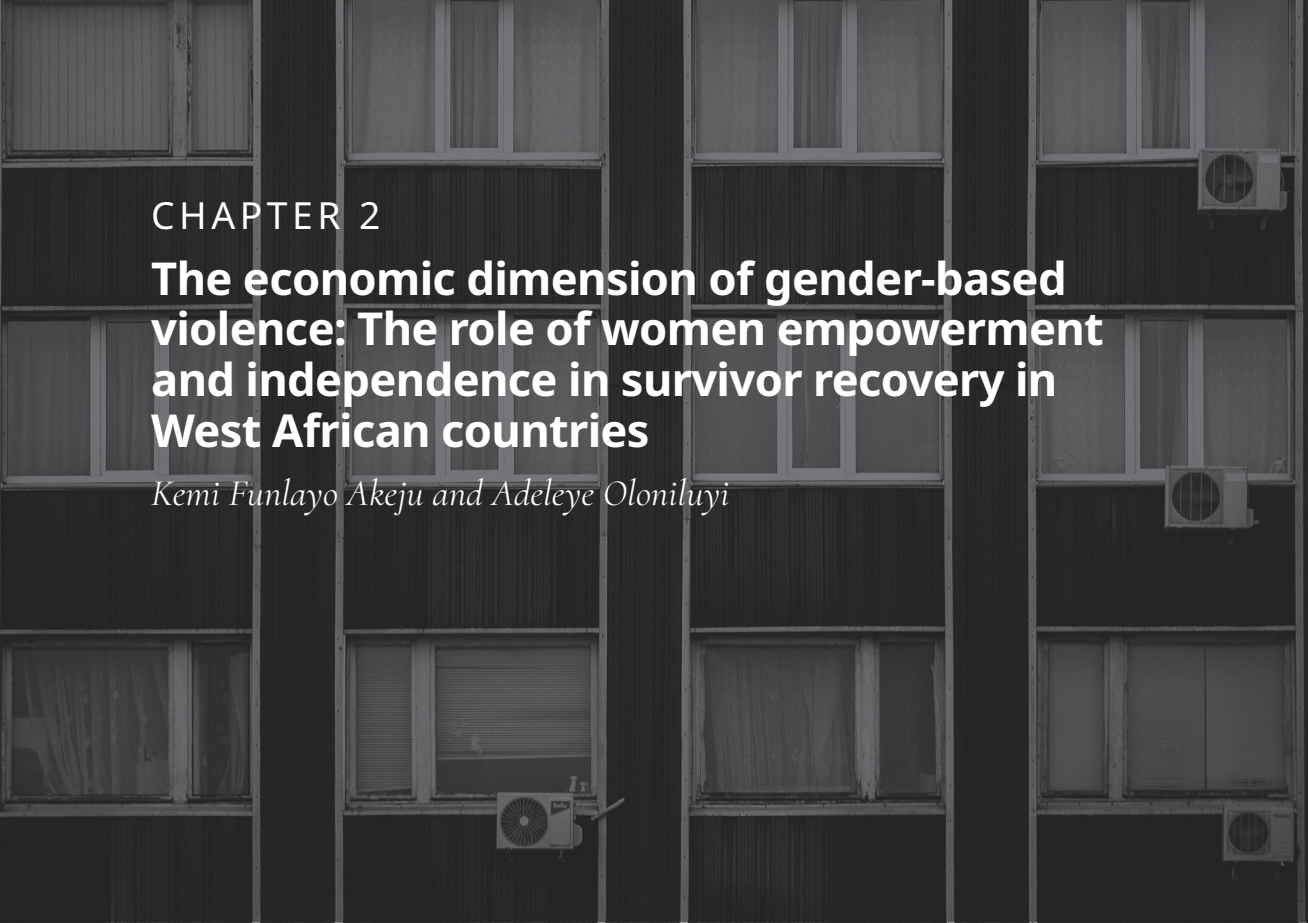




CHAPTER 2

The economic dimension of gender-based violence: The role of women empowerment and independence in survivor recovery in West African countries

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence directed against a person based on their gender and physical characteristics (Dlamini, 2021). There are many causes, but some have originated from longstanding and deeply entrenched norms that tolerate gender inequality and embed these inequalities within male hegemonic societal structures and institutions (Daly, 2023). Profound structural and socio-cultural inequalities systematically restrict individuals' ability to understand the full spectrum of their rights, reinforcing vulnerability (Riggirozzi, 2021). UN Women (2021) noted that this reality is continuously reinforced through targeted violence, involving patriarchal disparities of power, discriminatory norms, and various forms of inequalities that serve to deny women's human rights and perpetuate violence. Violence is one of the means through which male control over women's agency and sexuality is maintained (Rao, 2015; Gilson, 2022).

In the African context, national and customary laws, cultural gender norms, and traditional gender roles determine who can utilise and exercise influence

over natural resources, gender inequality is prevalent across all socio-economic domains, frequently marginalising women relative to men (Makama, 2013; Wood, 2019). Gender inequality and power inequalities in households are exacerbated by constraints on the environment, resource control, and land ownership. Biased cultural and gender preconceptions affect how men and women who work to protect and maintain the environment are treated differently, which ultimately affects the effectiveness and success of their efforts (James et al., 2021). Gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities determine how women and men access and control land and resources related to forests, agriculture, water, and fisheries (Singh, 2023). Gender inequalities are deeply rooted in legal and social norms, including unequal access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making (Kuroda et al., 2019).

GBV is a major human rights and public health issue that primarily affects women and girls of all ages around the world. In addition to its severe psychological and social effects, GBV has significant economic implications. GBV affects individuals, communities, and nations, with far-reaching economic implications (Oo, 2024; Parkinson, 2022). Long-term effects of GBV on victims, their families, and the larger society are inevitable. Research indicates that GBV can have a severe impact on women's reproductive health (Biribawa et al., 2020; Raftery et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2021; Mathis et al., 2024).

Research evaluating the socio-economic consequences of GBV has demonstrated its impact on worker productivity, economic growth, poverty, poor health outcomes; how it can increase social protection costs, and the social consequences that can result from it, such as social isolation associated with stigma, trauma, shame, and exclusion (Nsabimana & Uwimpuhwe, 2024; Nyathi et al., 2024). One in three women worldwide may encounter GBV at some point in their lives; around 35% of women have been victims of physical or sexual abuse in intimate relationships (World Bank Group, 2019). According to the World Health Organization's (2021) report, GBV affects about 37% of women in sub-Saharan Africa, with a prevalence as high as one in two in some nations. Intimate partners are also associated with up to 38% of female fatalities globally.

Empowering women is essential to poverty reduction and gender justice. As such, international cooperation is fundamental to protecting women and girls and guaranteeing their full participation in society (Asaleye & Strydom, 2022; Mbukanma & Strydom, 2021). Empowering all women and girls and achieving gender equality are Sustainable Development Goal 5 priorities. It primarily aims to eradicate all types of violence against women and girls, put an end to prejudice against them, and guarantee equitable opportunity for

leadership roles (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021; Leal Filho et al., 2023). Domestic abuse impacts millions of people worldwide and is more than a private problem; it is deeply connected to patriarchy and structural problems in society. A survivor's path can be protracted and difficult, frequently leaving them feeling alone and isolated from society. Micro-counselling and long-term therapy, as well as group support, are profound strategies to help women heal and reintegrate into society.

Women's access to wealth, land and jobs can also mitigate the effects of GBV or reduce gender inequality, and reinforce social expectations and norms (Jayachandran, 2015; Sweetman & Ezpeleta, 2017). The manifestations of GBV create a feedback loop that harms livelihoods, rights, conservation, and sustainable development by maintaining societal and cultural gender disparities and norms (Sweetman & Ezpeleta, 2017). GBV is a methodical way of controlling or preserving power disparities that cause conflict within families, communities, and among partners (Rezwana & Pain, 2021). It is used to enforce and defend current privileges surrounding natural resources. Additionally, GBV perpetrators support unlawful and illicit operations through sexual exploitation and/or impose control over women in places where legislation is lacking and justice is not consistently upheld (Burke et al., 2020). Many indigenous women experience intersecting and reinforcing forms of GBV because communities are frequently on the front lines of defending their territories, resources, and rights against extractive industries and corporate interests (Lansink & Nampewo, 2021).

The lack of legislation and policies is a barrier that women experience in reporting GBV, including fear of stigma and shame, financial barriers, and a lack of awareness of their human rights (Muuo et al., 2020). Empirical evidence reveals that the problem is prominent in developing countries with low socio-economic status and limited education, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Muluneh et al., 2020; Zegeye et al., 2022). The social and economic stress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequality (Dlamini, 2021). When half the world population was in lockdown due to COVID-19, the number of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 who were subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (GBV) was no less than 243 million (Yenilmez, 2021).

Many countries reported an escalation of GBV during the lockdowns, a result of pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities, economic and social stress caused by the pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures. Many women were in 'lockdown' at home with their

abusers while being cut off from their usual support services (Usta et al., 2021). Women with certain intersecting racial, gender and class identities who bear the brunt of structural inequalities are more vulnerable to GBV. In many countries, women from already marginalised communities find themselves on the frontlines as essential workers, in more economic distress as informal workers, or facing unaddressed institutional racism and health disparities.

The gender productivity gap

Gender disparity (gender gap) has been identified in all spheres of human endeavour, including social, economic, and political capacities (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021). In Africa, gender disparity has hindered or constrained transformation and productivity growth mechanisms in some sectors. The gender gap refers to the discrepancy between men and women in society which can be observed in their attitudes and accomplishments in various areas of life, including the social, political, intellectual, cultural, and economic. The scale of inter-border analysis is to provide and identify the most effective policies to close gender gaps. The European Commission (1998) described the gender gap as a disparity between women and men in terms of participation, access, rights, remuneration, or benefits. Harris (2017) asserts that the gap between the genders across all strata of life widened significantly in 2006. The global gender gap describes four basic measuring indices of the gender gap: (i) economic participation and opportunity, (ii) educational attainment, (iii) health and survival, and (iv) political empowerment (Koca, 2022).

The Global Gender Gap Index scores countries on a scale of 0 to 100, indicating the extent to which the gender gap has been bridged towards parity. In 2022, the total gender parity score increased from 67.9% to 68.1%. North America has the highest gender parity at 76.9%, while Europe has a 76.6% gap, closely followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, with 72.6% (World Economic Forum, 2022). Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific are the next regions, with 69.1% and 69%, respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which is ranked sixth, reports a parity score of 67.9%. The Middle East and North Africa, with a gender gap record of 63.4%, remain more than 4 percentage points behind SSA (World Economic Forum, 2022).

South Asia has the worst record of all the regions, with a gender parity score of 62.4% (World Economic Forum, 2022). The *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2022) showed significant progress in closing the gender gap by 68.1%. With the current rate of improvement, it is estimated that full parity will

be achieved in 132 years, compared to the 2021 proposal of 136 years. No country has fully reached gender parity (World Economic Forum, 2022). The report lists the top ten economies making progress towards gender parity by at least 80%. With 90.8%, Iceland ranks at the top globally (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Gender equality remains a crucial factor in determining a country's economic prosperity (Nguyen, 2021; Wibowo, 2023). The wealthiest nations invest in their human resources and facilitate a balance between work and family life for women. The gender productivity gap in SSA is significant, with women contributing substantially less to GDP than men due to gender discriminatory behaviour such as limited access to education and training, and social and cultural norms limiting women's economic participation. Women in Global South countries often face limited access to finance and credit, inadequate infrastructure, and underrepresentation in decision-making positions (Aduku et al., 2022; Van den Broeck et al., 2023). Developing nations exhibit significant labour productivity disparities across sectors and dual economies, characterised by high proportions of low productivity, primarily rural, activities and low proportions of high productivity, primarily urban, activities (Azenui & Rada, 2021; Yülek & Santos, 2022). Gendered labour markets interact intricately with structural change and with variations in sectoral and aggregate labour productivity. Significant urbanisation and demographic shifts accompany these structural changes, which enable technology to spread at both household and market production levels (Uberti & Douarin, 2022). These modifications have the potential to drastically alter how women access paid and unpaid labour.

Although the importance of structural changes in productivity levels, growth, and sectoral inequalities in productivity in SSA is vast, little is known about how these changes may affect labour market outcomes (Mensah et al., 2023). Numerous SSA studies indicate that female-managed land is less productive than land managed by males. Oseni et al. (2015) reported that the productivity on land managed by women was found to be 28% lower than that of plots handled by men in Nigeria (Abdisa et al., 2024). The productivity gap can be attributed to inequalities in labour input availability (Anik & Rahman, 2021; Kabeer, 2021), as well as inequalities in access to non-land agricultural input, technology, and extension services (Gebre et al., 2021; Tufa et al., 2022).

The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development include attaining gender equality as well as the goal of empowering women and girls. The performance of West African countries on global gender indices remains low, despite gender equality being a key development goal for the region and all of Africa (Ursavaş, 2022). This fact can

be attributed to a large proportion of women who are heavily involved in agriculture and have minimal control over productive inputs like land, water, and cutting-edge technologies, which contributes to the poor agricultural productivity in SSA, particularly in West Africa (Madi et al., 2020; Obayelu et al., 2020). The gender gap in agricultural output remains a major impediment to the expansion of the agricultural industry in West Africa.

Research demonstrates that women are not as empowered as men when it comes to controlling their time at home, taking on leadership positions in their communities, having access to important production variables, and making financial decisions. Bertrand et al. (2010) identified three proximate factors responsible for the gender wage gap in corporate organisations: (1) differences in training, (2) career interruptions, and (3) weekly working hours. Their study, conducted in collaboration with an American business school, revealed that men tend to take more finance courses and have higher GPAs. In contrast, women experience more career interruptions and work shorter hours, often in part-time positions and self-employment. Childbearing is a significant contributor to job risks, career discontinuity, and reduced work hours for women. Mukasa and Salami (2015) and Miriti et al. (2022) identified the gender productivity gap in agricultural output as a function of structural advantages for males and structural disadvantages for females.

Mukasa and Salami (2015) provide evidence from data on gender inequality in agricultural productivity in three sub-Saharan African countries and emphasise the key determinants of the gender productivity gap. It suggests that females are less endowed in terms of advantages in farming and are less productive than their male counterparts. Singbo et al. (2021) examined the productivity gap influencing factors between male and female farmers in Mali and found that the agricultural productivity of females is significantly lower than that of males, with factors such as low education levels, inexperience, capitalisation, and less protection from crime being risks among informal farm owners (Islam & Amin, 2023).

Household economic power/autonomy divide

Household decisions and autonomy are influenced by purchasing power, which is the financial strength of an individual or household driven by the productive power of the workforce, including disposable income, that generates market value added (Chandradasa et al., 2021). According to the OECD (2016), two significant household indicators of economic power are income, which pertains to the household's standard of living and includes real income reflected in a household's

disposable income and net transfer payments to a household. Similarly, a household's consumption patterns significantly influence its living standard. The United Kingdom Office of National Statistics established a stronger relationship between household well-being and consumption than that of its income (Lewis, 2014). The standard of living of a household is strongly determined by the disposable income available to an individual and the interaction among household disposable income, consumption patterns, and the distribution of consumption among household members (Bazillier et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2022).

Conceptualising autonomy in household decision-making involves the liberty of both genders to contribute to day-to-day running activities without contravention of one's rights (McGregor et al., 2019). Following John Stuart Mill's assertion of liberty, autonomy results from individual actions and thoughts in the social world (Sánchez Cámara, 2020). It is the ability to make choices based on individual preferences while acknowledging and honouring individuals' decisions and right of self-determination in society (Magalhães et al., 2019). It entails an individual communicating and acting on his decision without prejudice. Several studies revealed that household decision-making autonomy is determined by several factors, which include socio-cultural, age, education status, number of living children, years in marriage, ethnicity, religion, employment status, region of settlement, and family structure (Kritz & Adebuse, 1999; Sather & Shahnaz, 2000; Acharya et al., 2010; Imo, 2022). The family life cycle stage influences gender roles in intra-household decision-making, as well as the extent to which changes in relative economic power impact gender roles in decision-making regarding home ownership. A wife's engagement in the family's finances, which has historically been the responsibility of men, increases with her relative income. This insight is particularly relevant given the substantial labour market gains women have made over the last half-century.

Women's autonomy is multifaceted, encompassing social, psychological and technological dimensions of independence and self-determination (Mosanya & Kassie, 2024). Research has shown that a woman's autonomy and decision-making authority in the home can significantly impact how resources are allocated, her health outcomes, and the functioning of society (Cornish et al., 2021; Deschênes et al., 2020). Women often have increased control over how resources are allocated, which can result in more spending on the health and education of their children, particularly when they make up a larger portion of the household income. Bhandari et al. (2016) highlighted that enhancing the economic and educational standing of wives and their husbands may be the most effective strategy for advancing women's autonomy, as it grants them greater

leverage in bargaining and decision-making for the family. A woman's capacity to make decisions regarding her own and her family's health and well-being can be influenced by her level of autonomy (Self & Grabowski, 2012). A multifaceted strategy that includes governmental reforms, economic empowerment initiatives, and education is needed to address the disparity in family economic power/autonomy in West African countries.

Achieving gender equality through women's economic empowerment

Realising equal rights for women and men depends on women's economic empowerment. The capacity of women to equitably engage in existing markets, their influence over and utilisation of productive resources, their potential to find respectable jobs, and how to handle their own schedules, lives, and bodies, and their increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic choices at all levels, from the family to international institutions, are all potential strategies to promote the economic autonomy of women (Hendriks, 2019). Empowering women benefits not only women themselves, but also their entire households and society at large. These benefits include greater investments in children, reduced poverty for all, and enhanced aspirations for the next generation of girls and women (Onah et al., 2021). The result of women's economic empowerment has both an objective (economic achievement) and a subjective dimension (economic empowerment), as well as the process of empowerment (the exercise of agency).

Measures of economic achievement include gains in employment or business profits (McKenzie, 2021). Measures of subjective empowerment include increased household decision-making, such as how household income is utilised, independent decision-making regarding how a farm or business should operate and increased self-efficacy. The different household allocations of work and resources to men and women, due to traditional gender norms regulating family interactions, further constrain women's economic opportunities. Women's unpaid household and care work, along with their subordinate status in the family, can severely restrict their ability to seek better-paid work that requires time and other household resources, as they often lack the time, mobility, and household bargaining power (Power, 2020). Personal and societal resources that provide women the freedom to act independently and seize financial possibilities are among their capabilities. These include health status, skills, abilities, educational achievements, self-

confidence and risk preferences, economic and financial assets, and formal and informal networks.

Economies expand as more women work. Additionally, women's economic empowerment enhances productivity, promotes economic diversification, and improves income equality. Economic equality for women benefits businesses, as research has demonstrated that providing women with more job and leadership opportunities increases productivity and growth, ultimately benefiting businesses (Abdulrahman & Amoush, 2020). According to estimates, organisations with three or more women in top management roles perform better across the board (Ely & Thomas, 2020). On the other hand, the uneven playing field between women and men imposes high costs on the global economy (Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). Human capacity-building training and resources must be provided to empower women, and resilience, freedom, and self-worth must be nurtured. Women can be assisted in escaping abusive relationships and taking back their lives by providing them with information and encouragement.

Increased educational attainment among women and girls promotes inclusive economic growth and women's economic empowerment. For women's and girls' health and well-being, as well as their income-generating opportunities and participation in the formal labour market, education, upskilling, and re-skilling throughout life are essential. This is especially true considering the rapid technological and digital transformations that are affecting jobs. About 50% of the economic growth in OECD nations over the past 50 years can be attributed to higher educational attainment (Habibi & Zabardast, 2020). However, for most women, significant educational advancements have not led to improved job market outcomes. Goals 5 (achieving gender equality) and 8 (promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all), as well as Goal 1 (ending poverty), Goal 2 (ensuring food security), Goal 3 (ensuring health), and Goal 10 (reducing inequalities) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be accomplished in order to attain these objectives (Weiland et al., 2021).

Gender-based violence is a complicated problem with numerous underlying causes. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), survivor recovery depends on the ability to manage finances and participate in the economy (Zewde, 2023). GBV in times of crisis has been examined by UNICEF and the Criterion Institute (2020) as a factor that should be taken into consideration when making investment decisions. Gender-based violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown periods (UNICEF & Criterion Institute, 2020). Using extensive demographic and health survey data gathered before the epidemic, the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) examined the economic effects of violence against women in sub-Saharan Africa and revealed that one in three women had experienced physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives (Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021).

Worldwide, nowhere is less safe for a woman than her own home (Ardener, 2021). Violence against women and girls (VAWG) has enormous economic implications in addition to being a fundamental violation of human rights, a significant issue for public health, and disastrous for individual welfare. Reduced labour supply, lower productivity per hour worked, less investment in women's and children's human capital, and probably decreased investment due to increased demand for medical and legal services are some of the ways that VAWG generates 'economic costs'. Domestic abuse has a negative impact on businesses, with expenses related to greater absenteeism rates, worker turnover, presenteeism/reduced productivity, and the possibility of brand harm (ILO & UN Women, 2019). Gender equality and women's empowerment remain at the heart of the regional integration process. The strategic plan of the fifth session of the ECOWAS Parliament, adopted on 31 March, 2021, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, focused on equal opportunities for men and women and emphasised women's empowerment as a top national objective.

Financial independence in GBV survivor recovery in West Africa

Women's empowerment programmes in West African countries aim at reducing gender inequality. Across the region, these programmes seek to (a) provide women with socio-economic opportunities by offering them access to better information and skills to improve their livelihoods, (b) improve women's ability to make decisions, and (c) give women a greater voice in public and private spaces. Activities implemented under these projects encourage women to leave their homes to participate in training and group meetings, teaching them skills to help them become more vocal in their communities. In West Africa, achieving financial independence is not just an individual objective but an essential part of the healing process for victims of gender-based violence (Sinko & Saint Arnault, 2020).

Many women experience financial instability, which makes it challenging for them to regain control of their lives. A lack of economic resources might force people to stay in dangerous situations. Having financial resources may mean having more self-assurance in decision-making, being able to escape dangerous situations, and having access to opportunities for personal development

(Adelakun, 2023). As women become economically productive and earn more than their partners, they are able to enjoy their improved socio-economic status and challenge traditional gender roles. Moreover, they become more active in public spaces and exercise more autonomy in decision-making.

Notable progress for survivors includes increased women's participation in male-dominated sectors, improved socio-economic status, challenged traditional gender roles, becoming more active in public spaces, and exercising more autonomy in decision-making, earning more than their partners; entrenched household- and community-level power dynamics are threatened (Giammarioli et al., 2023). There is considerable empirical evidence that women's economic empowerment interventions, including activities to promote gender equality, can reduce rates of intimate partner violence, transactional sex, and GBV. Women can become less vulnerable to economic violence, which gives them better bargaining power and allows them to influence decision-making. Financial independence allows a woman the option to leave an abusive relationship because she can meet the material needs of her family. Earlier studies indicate that the most effective strategy for reducing GBV is collaborating with non-traditional partners, such as male acquaintances of women, religious and cultural leaders, and civic groups, to promote economic emancipation and gender equity initiatives (Onditi et al., 2021).

The Federal and State Ministries of Women Affairs in Nigeria have prioritised mitigating GBV in the national gender policy and action plan, based on constitutional principles such as equality, non-sexism, and women's rights (Ozioko, 2024). The first federal GBV referral policy and guidelines, which were produced in 2008 by the Federal Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization and a wide range of other partners, were primarily concerned with outlining the general intervention policy concepts and the roles and duties of stakeholders on clarifying broad intervention policy principles and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders. They explicitly outline the duties of government agencies and employees, such as health and social welfare officers, as well as the procedures for managing cases and assisting referrals (FMWASD, 2013). Ghana has adopted a combination of strategies and interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs was established through an Executive Instrument in January 2001 with the mandate of initiating, monitoring and executing policies to promote gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment across all sectors. The country introduced a gender-mainstreaming strategy to use the government's

fiscal policy to achieve gender equality with responsive budgeting piloted in three sectors of the economy (education, health, and agriculture) (Odoom et al., 2022).

According to the Mali Demographic and Health Survey (2018), 50% of married or separated women (49%) aged 15 to 49 have experienced profound mental, physical, or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Gender inequality and GBV are deeply ingrained in Mali's culture. The International Medical Corps, with funding from USAID, is implementing an integrated GBV response and prevention project that increases access to services for survivors. While partnering with localities to lessen the prejudice that survivors confront and tackle stereotypical and social customs that support inequalities based on gender, the project strengthens structural and service-provider capacity.

Conclusion and recommendations

In addition to being an invasion of basic rights, gender-based violence also prevents communities and nations from developing socially and economically. It hinders efforts to meet internationally recognised development objectives, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The COVID-19 pandemic increased gender disparities and the loss of livelihood for women, which increased the threat of poverty among the most vulnerable people and victims of gender-based violence. If these issues are not resolved, they will likely persist over time, with more complex and negative multiplier effects. As a result, it is important to empower GBV survivors by teaching them current self-employment skills and entrepreneurial creativity. For victims of gender-based violence to heal from the physical and psychological trauma they are experiencing, they need much assistance. Providing them opportunities to acquire new, lucrative skills could also significantly improve their quality of life.

The discourse around the economic empowerment of women has garnered considerable attention in contemporary times, particularly in areas confronting issues associated with domestic abuse. This applies to many West African countries that continue to face serious problems with domestic abuse, which affects many women and their families. Several programmes and activities are being implemented to empower survivors and assist them in reclaiming their lives. Many organisations have invested much time, money, and energy in developing and implementing treatment, care and support to mitigate GBV. While certain measures are successful in reducing violence, GBV still exists, and

consistent transformative strategies are required to advocate for changes in policy and legislation.

The public is calling for more targeted public health initiatives to ensure effective interventions. Low-income and conflict-affected nations are more likely to experience economic instability, gender inequality, discrimination against family rights, and a lack of adequate support services. Even in nations with advanced economies and populations, there are significant incidences of gender-based violence and inequality. The prevalence of violence against women is influenced by a number of economic risk factors. One of these is that their inability to get financial resources compromises their ability to engage in economic activity. Women are disproportionately prone to work in non-standard, precarious jobs, which offer fewer opportunities for training and advancement and raise the risk of segregation in the labour market and working in the informal economy.

Structural barriers must be addressed to close the gender productivity gap in West African countries and advance women's economic empowerment. Infrastructure development, financial access, and education can all contribute to achieving this goal, ultimately boosting GDP and economic growth. Reducing GBV and promoting women's economic empowerment can be achieved by improving access to education and entrepreneurial training, implementing psychosocial support programmes that provide women with more financial and credit options, investing in infrastructure development, and encouraging women to hold positions of decision-making authority.

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