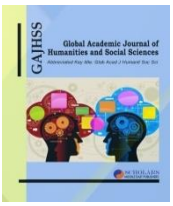
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Original Research Article

Evaluating the Impact of Community Policing on Gender-Based Violence Prevention in Rural Nigeria: Evidence from Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Plateau State

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Abstract: The study explored the capacity of community policing as an effective gender-responsive approach in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Plateau State. The problem informing the study is the continuing incidences of GBV even with the establishment of community policing structures in rural Nigeria. The study was guided by three specific objectives which identified community perceptions, stakeholder experiences, and institutional and socio-cultural barriers to gender-responsive policing. A qualitative research design was employed for the study, and data were obtained from the community leaders, women's groups, and police officers. Results from the study indicate that through community policing, there has been an increase in trust and awareness of the community; however, the practice has been little more than symbolic in the prevention of GBV due to the dominance of patriarchal norms, weak institutional capacity, limited gender training, and dependence on informal dispute resolution. In conclusion, the paper argues that community policing needs to be structurally gender-responsive, doing better than just being visible; to a point where policymakers should consider gender-sensitive training, institutional coordination, and enhanced government support for rural policing frameworks.

Keywords: Community Policing, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Gender-Responsive Policing, Barkin Ladi, Plateau State, Patriarchal Norms.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been increasingly acknowledged as being one of the major manifestations of human rights abuse which, to a great extent, prevent women from living freely, expressing themselves, and fully participating in social and economic life. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, GBV has endured as a structural problem rooted in gender imbalances, social norms, and weak institutions. In Nigeria, the problem is so huge as empirical data shows that most Nigerian women have been subjected at least once to some form of violence: physical, sexual or psychological abuse, either by their intimate partners or in the community, and the majority of them have hardly gained access to the justice system (Mshelia, 2021; Eniola & Aremo, 2023). This ongoing pattern of violence has been supported by the unequal power relations between men and women as a result of male superiority, the coercion of women as a culturally accepted phenomenon, and the inability of the formal state mechanisms to provide protection and justice in time (Ochube, 2022; Women for Women International, 2022). In communities where the traditional system

of governance is the main social institution, the structural gap between the local moral authority and formal law enforcement often makes GBV be considered "invisible crimes" that are usually settled at the family or traditional level instead of the justice system (Adelakun, 2021).

For the fact that the problems of GBV have lasted long in Nigeria, both research and policy efforts have focused attention on local community-based solutions as additional prevention and response mechanisms. Community policing is basically about partnership, problem-solving, and local participation. Therefore, community policing has been increasingly recommended as a key tool to fight gender-based insecurities as it places the preventative intervention within community networks (Arisukwu *et al.*, 2020; Bushumba, 2023). Instead of viewing the local police and the residents as two opposing parties, the model stresses the joint efforts in determining local risk factors, building confidence, and encouraging the sense of collective accountability for security.

Under circumstances where there is a limited police presence and a high level of mistrust, community policing can be the only security set-up that is capable of dealing with cases of GBV through early warning, mediation, and social accountability procedures (Saadi & Massawe, 2024). Changing the focus from state-based policing to security governance through community participation aligns with the global recognition that crime prevention goes beyond just law enforcement capability to respond, and includes the community's recognition of their role in the creation and maintenance of safety (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

In contrast, community policing, though seen as a major part of Nigeria's security reforms discussion, has found it difficult to yield tangible results for the prevention of gender-based violence. Existing literature on the subject have stayed largely on its contribution to crime reduction or counter-terrorism, with the gender aspect especially in rural areas, still largely untouched (Fiemotongha & Seaman, 2024). Community Policing National Policy, which is all about repairing the broken relationship between the police and the public, envisaged gender inclusion to be integral to community safety. Nevertheless, as Mshelia (2021) and Eze & Okonkwo (2024) note, deep-rooted male domination in the communities and lack of proper law enforcement have over time weakened women's involvement in security at the grassroots level, hence, their limited impact on decision-making and protective mechanisms. A common scenario is where gender-based violence is still being considered as a family issue rather than a crime against the community, even with the presence of both local and global instruments aimed at guaranteeing justice and protection.

Various African experiences offer somewhat contradictory lessons. For example, in Tanzania, Saadi and Massawe (2024) discovered that community policing only succeeded in increasing the number of GBV cases being reported, when women were given the chance to participate in community safety committees and when traditional leaders were made aware of the implications of gender inequalities. In the same vein, Bushumba (2023) revealed that community policing could successfully tackle GBV in Dar es Salaam when the police officers and community volunteers are trained in gender sensitivity and made aware of referral procedures. On the other hand, if community policing approaches do not consider gender power relations or if they are overly dependent on male community leaders, then the experiences of women will continue to be ignored and are unlikely to be taken seriously (Keith, *et al.*, 2022). Thus, these points of view imply that community policing is not an unbiased approach and its effectiveness depends to a great extent on whether it confronts or sustains the current social hierarchy. Surveys conducted by the World Bank and UN Women (Vemuru *et al*., 2019) reveal that in the case of Nigeria, gender-based violence is not only a driving factor of gender inequality but is also a result of it. In addition, women's dependence on men for their survival, living in a state of disorder and weak government are some of the factors that increase women's susceptibility to violence.

The World Bank Nigeria for Women Project recognizes that the involvement of the community is crucial to tackle the problem of GBV, however, it also points out that without the existence of local structures that are responsible to the community, preventive measures are bound to be only at the surface level (Vemuru *et al*., 2019). In the same manner, the FAO Nigeria (2021) GBV Prevention and Mitigation Action Plan indicated that the achievement of prevention is majorly dependent on the collaboration of local actors, traditional rulers and formal institutions in order to maintain the desired behavioral and structural changes. However, against these frameworks, many communities in rural areas, for instance, those in Plateau State, still depend on informal justice systems that emphasize the restoration of relationships more than the provision of justice, which leads to survivors being exposed to social double jeopardy of being stigmatized and neglected by institutions, thus continuing the cycle of violence (Fiemotongha & Seaman, 2024).

Barkin Ladi Local Government Area within Plateau State provides an especially interesting backdrop for the examination of these issues. The locality has been marred with continuous intercommunal clashes, population displacement, and poverty, which have all served as factors amplifying the vulnerability of women. Along well supported lines, one could say with Arisukwu *et al*., (2020) that the major factors behind the insecurity of rural areas are not just economic but also, and perhaps more importantly, institutional ones, which involve the breakdown of trust between the police and the local communities. In such delicate situations, community policing has the potential to be a game-changer if it is combined with gender-focused measures and actually implemented. However, testimonies and reports (Women for Women International, 2022; Evidence to Action Project, 2020), indicate that even though several community policing activities have been carried out based on local vigilante groups and community safety formations, the incidences of GBV have continued to be high and unreported in most cases. Consequently, there is a crucial issue at stake here, which is 'how much does community policing, as it is being conducted in Nigeria's rural areas today, really help in diminishing GBV, and through which contextual factors is its influence mediated'?

The importance of raising this issue is that the answer to it has the potential to open a pathway between two equally crucial fields of research and policy security governance and gender justice. Even though community policing is being widely trumpeted as a security model that is based on people's participation, its success or failure rests heavily on how inclusive and responsive its implementation is. Furthermore, as a matter of fact, Adelakun (2021) explains that community leadership in West Africa acts as a double-edged sword since it has the capacity to either facilitate justice or tighten the chains of gendered oppression through which victims are silenced. Hence, it is of great importance to understand how community policing affects the existing gender norms and power structures if one is to come up with methods that not only work but are also fair. In addition, the nexus of gender, community, and policing in a rural Nigerian context not only throws light on the issue of local governance and trust-building but also on the question of institutional legitimacy in fragile environments.

Against this background, the present study has made it its goal to assess the impact of community-based policing on the prevention of gender-based violence in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Plateau State. The study's specific objectives is to: (i) identify the extent to which policing in the community through various measures has influence on discouraging and reporting of GBV (ii) find out how key community stakeholders such as chiefs, women's groups, and local police perceive the effectiveness of community policing; (iii) point out institutional and cultural factors that hinders gender-responsive policing in rural areas. The believe of the study is that the elimination of violence should be a joint effort and at the same time it should be different from the local needs, that is, not only the perpetrators' behavior but also the community's structural vulnerability to abuse.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is the name given to all forms of mistreatment inflicted on people just because society labels them with certain gender roles and therefore considers them to be at a disadvantage in terms of power. These types of violence, which are physical, sexual, psychological, and economic, largely depict the deep-rooted prejudice against women and girls (Ochube, 2022). Various literature have shown that GBV is both a symptom and a tool for the patriarchal system to retain control and to perpetuate structural injustice.

Violence in Nigeria has manifested in the domestic environment, educational institutions, workplaces, and amongst neighbours, and the underlying cause has invariably been the perpetuated culture of male domination and female submission (Fiemotongha & Seaman, 2024; Mshelia, 2021). According to Eniola and Aremo (2023), one of the factors that have sustained the prevalence of GBV in Nigeria is the non-rigid enforcement of existing legal frameworks such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015. Also, they point out the insufficient capacity of government institutions at the grass-root level as another factor.

In addition, gendered roles that blame the victims and elevate the silence of the victims have created an "institutionalized invisibility" of GBV cases, thus making them not only underreported but also under-prosecuted. FAO Nigeria (2021) points out that the most vulnerable groups such as rural women, displaced persons, and those living in poverty are the least to be able to access the formal justice systems because of factors like distance, cost, and fear of reprisal.

On the world stage, Keith, *et al.,* (2022) reveal that the main root causes of GBV are structural such as poverty, war, and discrimination, and that these three elements in fact overlap in such a way that they reinforce one another. Gender-based violence continues to be seen as a public security and development problem in Nigeria, and has been

described by Vemuru *et al*., (2019) as hindering women from being fully involved in community governance and economic activities. This situation have given gender-based violence (GBV) the description of not simply a social problem but also a systemic governance failure that calls for a multi-level interventions for prevention, empowerment, and accountability.

2.2 Community Policing and Security Governance

Community policing has become a collaborative way of running the law enforcement system by which police and citizens work together through partnership, trust, and problem-solving in a proactive manner. It is based on the premise that everyone is to blame for security and thus only through regular communication and cooperation can it be achieved, not by force or control (Arisukwu *et al*., 2020). The idea was born due to the weaknesses of the traditional reactive law enforcement system which not only ignored the needs of the communities but also created more distrust, especially in the societies with multiple authority structures. Community policing signifies the linking of the state and local communities through traditional practices in rural Africa where state law is hardly felt (Bushumba, 2023). Community policing promotes restorative justice since it allows citizens to recognize the threats, settle the conflicts and work with the police. Yet, as Saadi and Massawe (2024) argue, community policing has to extend its scope from crime prevention to social protection, especially for addressing the problem of GBV which is due to the societal practices of gendered oppression and male dominance.

The Nigerian case study demonstrates the coexistence of both the possibilities and the paradoxes. As per Adelakun (2021), the incorporation of community leaders into adjudicatory institutions undoubtedly grants such mechanisms the recognition they deserve but at the same time it is a huge challenge that these very leaders pose to women seeking justice by the way they reproduce patriarchal bias. Arisukwu *et al*., (2020) revealed that the members of community policing committees in rural areas rarely had equal representation from both sexes nor did they have the formal training to gain the necessary skills that would enable them to handle GBV cases properly. In essence, the community policing framework, though its blueprint is inclusive, falls short of being gender-sensitive or human rights-compliant in its actualization.

The success of community policing rests greatly on the factors of trust, representation, and local relevance. The International Organization for Migration (2020) points out that in fragile settings, a security governance system that is participatory can only be achieved with the involvement of local communities through enlightening initiatives, victim support systems, and opening doors of cooperation with women's groups at community level. In the absence of these elements, law enforcement will be nothing but reactive and, similarly, community trust will be weak.

2.3 Community Policing and GBV Prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa

Various research across sub-Saharan Africa has been continuously shedding light on the role that community policing plays in the fight against gender-based violence and how that has different levels of success in each case. One example is Tanzania, where Bushumba (2023) found that community policing programs in Dar es Salaam led to a decrease in gender-based violence cases when the police and the community were partners and had regular dialogues, gender training, and working together on cases. Besides that, Saadi and Massawe (2024) identified that in Simanjiro District, women were the main group who reported cases of domestic violence and offenders faced less impunity because of the existence of gender-responsive policing frameworks. However, the literature that already exists also indicates that there are both structural and cultural barriers. Keith, *et al*., (2022) caution that community policing without proper institutional accountability and gender sensitivity may actually help to maintain the existing patriarchal structures as it may leave the issue of informal justice systems unaddressed.

Glass *et al*. (2018) reiterate that community policing has to be combined with psychosocial support and survivor-centered referral mechanisms to make a successful intervention against GBV in humanitarian and post-conflict settings. On the other hand, the local communities, especially in the rural African areas, where such integrations are absent, have seen very little change beyond mere symbolism. By analyzing the intervention strategies, Tappis *et al.,* (2016) came up with the conclusion that it is impossible to bring about lasting change unless the community takes ownership of the gender equality norms. In fact, they observed that allowing women to play a role in the community policing committees as decision-makers and not just victims or informants results in a noticeable reduction of GBV cases. The findings of these studies indicate that only if community policing is developed into a gender-inclusive and rights-based framework can it be a tool for preventing GBV.

2.4 Empirical Studies on Community Policing and GBV in Nigeria

Traditionally, researchers in Nigeria have been concentrating on community policing as a tool

for crime control. However, literature is now acknowledging community policing as a vehicle for GBV prevention. Arisukwu *et al*. (2020) revealed that involving local community members in crime prevention leads to a significant increase in neighborhood safety. Nevertheless, the gender issue was overlooked as women were rarely allowed to have a say in the decision-making committees. Correspondingly, Mshelia (2021) found that the issue, although it has been given more public attention, most of the victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in the northern and central parts of Nigeria opt for unofficial arbitration rather than police intervention. The main reasons indicated were the fear of stigma and the lack of trust in law enforcement authorities. Fiemotongha and Seaman (2024) by their study on Bayelsa State, revealed that community policing models were weak in tackling GBV. They argued that the dominance of traditional and religious practices that heavily emphasize reconciliation over punishment still prevail, thus the case of GBV is traditional seen as a private matter.

Besides, Eniola and Aremo (2023) elucidated that the deeply-rooted patriarchal beliefs that are reflected in the political and community leadership become a hindrance to the enforcement of gender protection laws. They put forward that in order for community policing to be a weapon against GBV, it should include advocacy, capacity development, and legal literacy for both men and women. Adelakun (2021) continues to argue in this direction by highlighting the role of community leaders as moral and judicial figures who have the power to act as either facilitators or inhibitors of justice. Comparing Nigeria and Ghana they revealed that community acceptance is the main reason for successful enforcement, and not legal power. The findings of Adelakun (2020) agrees with the Evidence to Action (E2A) Project (2020) that illustrated that community-driven awareness campaigns and designating female focal points in security personnel led to a significant rise in the rate of GBV incident reporting.

In addition, The World Bank's Nigeria for Women Project (Vemuru *et al.*, 2019) and FAO Nigeria's (2021) GBV Action Plan highlight the fact that the efforts aimed at prevention should primarily serve to develop local institutional capacity through mechanisms such as community accountability, gender sensitization, and survivor referral networks. However, according to the report by Women for Women International (2022), the underfunding of the system, weak monitoring, and the absence of gender mainstreaming in the security sector continue to stand as obstacles to the realization of desired results. Taken together, these research works reveal that community policing is an avenue to the prevention of GBV. Its success, however, hinges on the level of gender inclusion, institutional coordination, and community trust especially in the rural areas such as Plateau State.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks that complement each other, Institutional Theory and Feminist Social Ecology Theory, were combined in this paper to shed more light on the role of community policing in securing the rural areas of Nigeria from gender-based violence (GBV). Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Adelakun, 2021) explains an organization's efforts to acquire legitimacy by complying with the societal norms and standards which are considered acceptable by the general public. Through community policing, this theory describes how community security networks initiate participatory and gender-sensitive approaches not simply for the sake of operational effectiveness but also to get moral and social legitimacy from their community members. Community policing is able to prevent GBV when units involved in such policing activities assess gender issues and human rights adherence as their moral and social responsibilities thereby gaining trust and acceptance from the community. Feminist Social Ecology Theory, which runs through the interpretations of Eniola and Aremo (2023) and Keith *et al*., (2022), explains female victims of gender-based violence as still having to do with the power and control relations between men and women operating at the various intra-individual, interpersonal, community, and societal levels. Abuse against women is not an individual problem but an issue of misuse of power by the gender that is dominant (men) and such powers are those that emanate from and are solidified by social institutions like family, religion, government, etc. Without community-level awareness and attitude transformation, institutional level enforcement of protective laws, and interpersonal accountability, community policing cannot bring about GBV reduction. The merging of these two concepts portrays community policing as a phenomenon that is both institutional and cultural a tool that can be used to perpetuate gender discrimination or to empower women if properly designed and implemented. While the institutional perspective sees the structure and legitimacy of community policing for instance, the ecological lens interests in the power and social setting. Therefore, combining these two perspectives as a framework of analysis will aid this study in examining how community policing programs in Barkin Ladi LGA are influenced by gendered norms and institutional realities and how that influences gender based violence in the positive or negative.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research work utilizes a descriptive and explanatory cross-sectional study design with a mixed-methods approach to investigate the perceptions of community members on how community policing helps in the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State. A mixed-method research is fit for perceptual studies as it combines the quantitative extent to qualitative depth, thus the researcher can use statistics as well as explanations in context (Creswell, 2018; Bryman, 2016). The descriptive part of the study helps to find out how the community members view the community policing programs, and the explanatory part of the study tries to figure out the ways in which these views are connected to the outcomes of gender-based violence prevention. Barkin Ladi LGA, in the central senatorial zone of Plateau State, with a population of 271,401 people (Citi-Facts, 2025), is a blend of rural and peri-urban settlements. The area has faced periodic communal conflicts as well as economic problems which have resulted in increased vulnerabilities of women and children. Security challenges besides social insecurities have led to the formation of community policing committees, local vigilante groups, and women's organizations at the wards level. Therefore, the current social and security situation in Barkin Ladi makes it an appropriate context in which to study people's perceptions of community policing as a tool for the prevention of GBV.

The target population of this perceptual study include all residents of Barkin Ladi Local Government Area (LGA) in Plateau State, of which GBV key stakeholder groups who are most in contact with or are affected by the security operations constitute the following: Community policing officers and vigilante members, Women's association leaders and members, Traditional and religious leaders, and Adult community residents from the selected wards. Because of the nature of GBV which is a very sensitive issue and the fact that survivors may not be willing to give information, this study has a perceptual focus relying on knowledgeable stakeholders but not on direct victims. This method is in line with the ethical guidance of carrying out research on sensitive social issues where utmost confidentiality and voluntariness are the key requirements (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the sample size for this study is determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size from a finite population:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = total population
- e = margin of error (0.05 for 95% confidence level)

Using the projected population of 271,401, the calculation is as follows:

$$n = \frac{271{,}401}{1+271{,}401(0.05^2)} = n = \frac{271{,}401}{1+679.50} = n = \frac{271{,}401}{680.5} = 399$$

Thus, the study adopts a sample size of 399 respondents for the survey. To complement the quantitative data, 15 key informants, comprising 10 police and community policing officers and 5 women's group leaders, who will be purposively selected for qualitative interviews. After deducting these, the remaining 384 respondents will be proportionally distributed across the four stakeholder strata based on their estimated representation within the local population as seen in table 3.1. (Saunders, *et al.*, 2019).

Table 3.1: Proportional distribution of sample

Category	Proportion (%)	Calculation	Sample size
Community policing officers/vigilante	20%	0.20 × 384	77
Women's associations/leaders	25%	0.25 × 384	96
Traditional/religious leaders	15%	0.15 × 384	58
Adult community residents	40%	0.40 × 384	153
Total (Quantitative)	**100%**		**384**
Key informants (Qualitative)	—	10 + 5	**15**
Grand Total	—	—	**399**

Two complementary instruments will be deployed, including a structured questionnaire for quantifying perceptions of the effectiveness of community policing in preventing GBV. This instrument will contain a few sections demography, awareness of community policing initiatives, perceived community-police collaboration, and observed influence on GBV prevention. The responses will be rated on a 4-point Likert scale (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). On the other hand, a Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide will be used to collect qualitative data from selected police officers and women's group leaders. The guide will dive deeper into matters like gender responsiveness in community policing, trust between police and citizens, and institutional challenges in addressing GBV. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) assert

that semi-structured interviews allow participants to reveal subtle feelings that enrich scientific data.

Data collection will be carried out over four weeks within which research assistants who have been trained for the quantitative part will administer the questionnaires in-person to guarantee high response rates and comprehension. The qualitative part will consist of the interviews which will be conducted at a community center or another neutral place allowing complete participant confidentiality. Every meeting lasts about 30 to 40 minutes and with prior consent were recorded. The ethical procedure will be strictly followed: Participants will be given the information sheets explaining the study's purpose, their anonymity will be guaranteed and they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Due to the nature of the topic, GBV, referrals will be arranged for any participant who may become distressed and this will be in line with the ethical guidelines WHO (2021). The questionnaire data will be coded and analyzed with the help of SPSS version 28. To profile respondents and identify trends descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and standard deviations) will be utilized. The association between perceptions of community policing effectiveness and perceived reduction in GBV incidents will be tested using inferential tests such as Chi-square tests of independence and binary logistic regression. Field (2018) points out that these tests are suitable for nonparametric categorical data found in social studies. The transcripts from the interviews will then be thoroughly checked and the thematic analysis will be performed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method. The results from both methods will be combined through convergent triangulation which will offer credible evidence and deepen the level of explanation of the research (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Reliability and validity will be assured by triangulation, expert validation, and consistency checks.

The reliability for the quantitative aspect will be measured using Cronbach's alpha; while the credibility and confirmability, for the qualitative segment, will be conducted through respondent validation and audit trails (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ethical considerations that have been incorporated are voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of data. In accordance with the guideline of the Plateau State Research Ethics Committee, informed consent was secured and data safeguarded through double encryption. Any sensitive information disclosed with regard to GBV will be kept anonymous in order to protect the participants from potential social backlash.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is concerned with the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the data collected for the research. A total of 399 questionnaires were distributed to respondents representing different stakeholders in Barkin Ladi LGA. Out of the total questionnaires, 372 were duly completed and returned, thus making a response rate of 93.2%. Furthermore, 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) consisting of 10 community policing officers and 5 women's group leaders were interviewed to supplement the quantitative findings with qualitative depth. The data presentation has been done along the specific objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts and percentages were the main techniques used to summarize the quantitative data, while the qualitative insights of key informants have been used to interpret the data in context.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Various demographic features of the 372 respondents are being presented here to show the basis on which their opinions on community policing and GBV prevention in Barkin Ladi were gathered. The features that were taken into consideration include sex, age, marital status, occupation, level of education, and years of stay in the community.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 372)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	202	54.3
	Female	170	45.7
Age (years)	18–29	63	16.9
	30–39	106	28.5
	40–49	121	32.5
	50 and above	82	22.0
Marital Status	Single	88	23.7
	Married	225	60.5
	Widowed	30	8.1
	Divorced	29	7.8
Occupation	Police/Vigilante	70	18.8
	Community Leader	54	14.5
	Women’s Group Member	80	21.5

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	Other (Farmers/Traders/Artisans)	168	45.2
Level of Education	No formal education	34	9.1
	Primary	78	21.0
	Secondary	137	36.8
	Tertiary	123	33.1
Years of Residence	Less than 5 years	39	10.5
	5–10 years	84	22.6
	11–15 years	114	30.6
	Over 15 years	135	36.3

Source: *Field Survey, 2025.*

According to Table 4.1, there is almost an equal number of male (54.3%) and female (45.7%) respondents, indicating the gender-diverse approach of the sampling strategy that targeted community policing actors and women's groups. The age breakdown points out that the majority of respondents (61%) belong to the economically and socially active 30-49 years age group, suggesting that most of these people are actively involved in community life and participate in security structures. The data shows that about 60.5% of the respondents were married, which is culturally typical of the rural area of Plateau state where marital status is a strong predictor of community participation and leadership roles. On the profession of respondents, it is observed that about 45.2% included farmers, traders, and craftsmen, which fits with the mainly agricultural setting of Barkin Ladi. The level of education was fairly high, as 69.9% of the respondents have at least finished secondary school, and this indicate a decent level of literacy that is believed to relate with awareness that would enable them to provide well-informed answers.

Concerning their residential status, 66.9% of respondents were long-term residents (more than 10 years) of the area, a fact that may indicate their deep understanding of local law enforcement systems and the community dynamics surrounding the issue of GBV. Such demographic trends demonstrate that the respondents have adequate personal experience and contextual knowledge that makes their views on community policing and its perceived contribution to GBV prevention in Barkin Ladi reliable.

4.2 Community Policing Initiatives and the Prevention/Reporting of Gender-Based Violence

The section is a presentation of the research findings on the first objective, which was aimed at determining the level of community policing initiatives' impact on both the prevention and reporting of gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area. The data analysis is a reflection of the respondents' opinions about the community policing effectiveness in raising awareness of, preventing, and reporting GBV in the study area.

Table 4.2: Respondents' Perception of the Influence of Community Policing on GBV Prevention and Reporting (n = 372)

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Community policing activities are well known among residents in Barkin Ladi.	37.9	35.5	17.2	9.4	3.02	0.97	Agree
2	Community policing officers regularly sensitize the public on the dangers of GBV.	25.3	30.6	28.0	16.1	2.65	1.08	Disagree
3	There are established mechanisms within community policing to report GBV cases.	27.6	29.8	26.6	16.0	2.69	1.03	Disagree
4	Community policing has increased community members' willingness to report GBV incidents.	26.1	31.7	27.4	14.8	2.69	1.01	Disagree
5	Collaboration between police officers and traditional leaders has reduced GBV in the area.	32.8	33.3	21.5	12.4	2.87	0.98	Agree
6	Community policing initiatives have improved the safety of women and girls in Barkin Ladi.	29.0	31.2	25.0	14.8	2.75	1.02	Disagree
7	Victims of GBV now report incidents more freely due to the presence of community policing officers.	22.6	29.3	31.7	16.4	2.59	1.05	Disagree

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
8	GBV cases are followed up to conclusion through community policing structures.	18.8	27.7	34.9	18.6	2.47	1.07	Disagree
	Weighted Mean = 2.71 (Disagree)							

Source: *Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 4.2 shows the respondents' beliefs about the role of community policing in tackling and reporting gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi. The total weighted mean score of 2.71 (SD = 1.03) reveals that, on average, the respondents did not agree that community policing has considerably affected the prevention or reporting of gender-based violence.

Respondents' familiarity with community policing components is quite high (Mean=3.02) whereas other community policing items exert less influence. Only two indicators, i.e., knowledge of activities and collaboration with traditional leaders (Mean = 2.87), garnered the respondents' "Agree" responses. This means that the community policing operation is tangible, though its effect on the problem of gender-based violence remains limited and uneven. According to most of the respondents, regular sensitization (Mean = 2.65), the existence of reporting mechanisms (Mean = 2.69) and the follow-up of cases (Mean = 2.47) are some areas they disagree with. The aforementioned results indicate that although community policing structures are present, their use and management within the GBV prevention frameworks is still in its infancy, the local institutional coordination is weak and socio-cultural barriers are still prevailing.

Qualitative Insights

The qualitative data strengthens the quantitative findings by showing that people are on the fence to some extent about community policing impact on GBV prevention at the local level. Community policing is credited with opening up channels of communication and raising awareness but it is acknowledged that people still don't report much and not many cases get resolved, in fact member of the public stress its limited influence in these areas. A woman leader from Barkin Ladi Woman's Peace Forum said:

> "On the one hand, community policing has made the people discuss more about their domestic problems. On the other hand, when it comes to real violence like rape or physical attack, the majority of women still do not disclose. The fear of gossip and shame is very strong."(Women's Group Leader, KII, 2025)

On the other hand, a member of community policing disclosed that although local diligence has been sharp through patrols and community meetings, the interventions specifically targeting GBV are still below par:

> "Most of our reports and investigations are about theft, land issues, and night patrols. GBV cases are extremely sensitive and most of the times families will tell us that they do not want their cases to be taken to the police station. So, lots of cases naturally go dead." (Male Community Policing Officer, KII, 2025)

Furthermore, the traditional leader in Gindiri added:

> "Sometimes the local peace committees handle such issues secretly as the police involvement to the matter might ruin the family's name.People prefer to settle matters at home."(Traditional Leader, KII, 2025)

In addition, the above, there is high level of agreement that the women have become aware of their right as was highlighted by female volunteer of a youth group who mentioned the changes in the level of awareness and how far the institutional support structures are, arguing that: "Women today are aware that it is wrong to beat or harass them, but they are still unaware of the people to call or how to proceed with such cases, as the system is not strong enough to protect them." The study reveals therefore, that community policing has brought about an improvement in the presence, communication, and informal knowledge of safety issues but its impact on the prevention and reporting of GBV has not been very great. The result shows little consistency in the execution of awareness programs, as well as the procedures for reporting which are not well institutionalized. Also, the majority of GBV incidents are still being resolved through informal means. There is an observed cultural reluctance to speak; there is lack of gender-sensitive training, and an insufficiency in cooperation between the community members and the formal police units. These factors are believed to be impeding sustainable progress in this area.

4.3 Perceptions of Stakeholders on the Effectiveness of Community Policing

The findings on the second objective is presented in this section, to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders which includes community leaders, women's groups, and law-enforcement officers, regarding the effectiveness of community policing in preventing gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi LGA.

Table 4.3: Respondents' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Community Policing in GBV Prevention (n = 372)

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
9	Community members perceive community policing as a trusted mechanism for ensuring safety.	33.6	38.2	20.2	8.0	2.98	0.93	Agree
10	Women's groups are adequately represented in community policing committees.	18.3	26.5	31.7	23.5	2.40	1.05	Disagree
11	Traditional and religious leaders cooperate effectively with community policing officers.	31.2	40.1	18.0	10.7	2.92	0.91	Agree
12	Police-community partnerships have strengthened local trust in GBV prevention efforts.	27.1	30.4	28.5	14.0	2.70	0.97	Agree
13	Community policing officers are adequately trained to handle GBV-related cases.	19.4	25.0	32.8	22.8	2.41	1.06	Disagree
14	Police and community policing volunteers treat GBV cases with fairness and sensitivity.	22.8	29.8	30.6	16.8	2.59	1.02	Agree
15	Community policing has led to improved coordination between law enforcement and the community in GBV prevention.	24.2	32.0	27.1	16.7	2.64	0.96	Agree
16	Stakeholders believe community policing has been effective in reducing GBV in Barkin Ladi.	20.4	29.0	30.4	20.2	2.50	1.00	Agree
Weighted Mean = 2.77 (Agree)								

Source: *Field Survey, 2025.*

From the table 4.3, it is obvious that the overall weighted mean of 2.77 (SD = 0.99) which is above the cut-off mark of 2.5, indicates a general agreement among those who responded to the survey that community policing has been moderately effective in promoting community safety and helping to prevent GBV in Barkin Ladi. The respondents to the survey seemed to hold a view that community policing is very highly legitimate and closely trusted by the locals. (Mean = 2.98) and it also benefits from the collaboration of the traditional and religious leaders (Mean = 2.92). Besides that, the results show that there is a greater coordination between law enforcement and community structures (Mean = 2.64) and that to some extent, the initiative has helped to lower GBV (Mean = 2.50). Nevertheless, significant weaknesses especially in terms of gender inclusion (Mean = 2.40) and lack of specialized GBV training for officers (Mean = 2.41) is seen to still exist. Consequently, the results significantly support the view that community policing is largely appreciated and trusted but at the same time it is only barely gender-responsive and has limited operational expertise.

Qualitative Insights

The interviews provided a depth to these results, showing that community policing in Barkin Ladi is still able to command the community's respect but at the same time, it has not yet achieved full operational maturity in gender-responsive policing. One of the police officers in the LGA talked about the gap between the legitimacy and capacity:

> "Through community policing, the people have started trusting us more since we are their neighbors, but unfortunately, we do not have the necessary equipment and training in gender issues to handle the sensitive GBV cases. Trust without skill will never be enough." (Police Officer, KII, 2025)

A leader of a women's group supported the idea of the need for inclusion:

> "Women are hardly present at community policing meetings when decisions are made. How are they supposed to comprehend the issues faced by women if we are not there to represent them?" (Women's Group Leader, KII, 2025)

A traditional leader pointed out the partnership being only symbolic but he was aware of the structural limitations:

> "We are always there to support the police and volunteers but, in fact, we only have an advisory role. They require proper training from the government and support from authorities if they are to deal with the gender issues appropriately."(Traditional Ruler, KII, 2025)

There was the believe among interview participants that there is lack of knowledge in the side of the police and cautious optimism among community members as expressed below:

> "These days, one can easily report a petty crime or a fight. However, as far as GBV is

concerned, the cases are still kept under wraps because police officers do not know how to handle the situation without disrespecting the family or the elders." (Youth Advocate, KII, 2025)

"We are witnessing progress in that the police are not feared anymore as people used to do, but their work in the field of GBV is still inadequate because the majority of villages still lack female officers."(Female Community Volunteer, KII, 2025)

By these responses, it suffices to conclude that community policing in Barkin Ladi is broadly supported and institutionally recognized as a framework for improving community safety and trust. The stakeholders are of the opinion that the framework is moderately effective especially in relationship-building and joint problem-solving with traditional leaders. However, the initiative is still being held back by the lack of gender inclusion, insufficient training on GBV sensitivity, and irregular procedural follow-up. For that reason, while the system is functionally sound and has legitimacy, its gender responsiveness, and practice are far from being consistent.

4.4 Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Gender-Responsive Policing

This section discusses institutional, cultural, and systemic factors that serve as impediment to the gender responsiveness of community policing in Barkin Ladi. It examines the effects of patriarchal norms, religious traditions, insufficient training, and poor coordination between formal and informal policing structures on the effectiveness of GBV prevention.

Table 4.4: Respondents' Perception of Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Gender-Responsive Policing (n = 372)

S/N	Item	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
17	Patriarchal norms hinder women's participation in policing and justice processes.	46.8	35.1	10.8	7.3	3.22	0.91	Agree
18	Cultural beliefs discourage survivors from reporting GBV incidents.	44.1	38.7	11.3	5.9	3.21	0.88	Agree
19	Some traditional leaders prefer to settle GBV cases privately rather than report to authorities.	49.5	36.3	8.1	6.1	3.29	0.86	Agree
20	Lack of gender-sensitivity training among police officers limits GBV response effectiveness.	41.4	34.7	15.1	8.8	3.09	0.93	Agree
21	Inadequate coordination between community policing committees and formal police weakens GBV interventions.	39.2	37.9	14.8	8.1	3.08	0.91	Agree
22	Fear of social stigma prevents victims from cooperating with community policing officers.	42.5	39.8	12.1	5.6	3.19	0.89	Agree
23	Limited government support affects the sustainability of gender-sensitive community policing programs.	40.1	33.9	17.2	8.8	3.05	0.94	Agree
24	Religious beliefs sometimes justify silence or tolerance of GBV acts.	37.1	35.7	16.9	10.3	2.99	0.97	Agree
Weighted Mean = 3.14 (Agree)								

Source: *Field Survey, 2025.*

Table 4.4 illustrates that respondents were nearly unanimous in their agreement that a number of both institutional and socio-cultural factors continue to frustrate the efforts of gender-responsive policing in Barkin Ladi. The overall weighted mean of 3.14 (SD = 0.91) indicates that these obstacles not only exist, but they are deeply embedded in the structure of the local police work.

Most of the respondents strongly supported the points that traditional leaders mostly prefer informal settlements of GBV cases (Mean = 3.29), patriarchal norms limit women's participation in justice processes (Mean = 3.22), and cultural beliefs prevent survivors from reporting incidents (Mean = 3.21). All these factors are in line with the behavior of the community policing structure which, although being participatory, is still dominated by cultural norms that put family cohesion and male authority

above institutional justice, thereby limiting access to justice for women.

On the other hand, respondents were of the opinion that fear of stigma (Mean = 3.19), insufficient coordination between community and formal police (Mean = 3.08), and the absence of gender-sensitivity training (Mean = 3.09) are among the factors that worsen the situation and result in disjointed case management and inadequate support for survivors.

Qualitative Insights

From the interviews, it was revealed that the gender-responsive policing in Barkin Ladi is still limited by the dominant patriarchal culture, which affects normal daily interactions and leniently governs the behavior of victims and law enforcement officers, as well as by the insufficient work of police mechanisms designed to address gender issues.

One of the leaders from a women's group indicated that "a lot of women think that it is the family that is disgraced by the reporting of violence from a husband or a relative. Even the police officers in some cases tell them to go home and compromise quietly." Such acceptance of the subservient role that women have to play in the context of men is the reason why these women still suffer in silence, and it also helps force settlements outside the courts in cases where the traditional leaders are very influential.

There was also an acknowledgment of such conflicts by community policing officers. A community policing officer said:

> "Because we are the ones responsible for keeping the peace, it is often the case that the peace here is understood as a compromise. In the case of domestic violence, the elders will more likely want us to talk to the husband instead of arresting him which would create division."

This example perfectly reflects the difficulties that internally displaced persons face when their concepts of peace and good order - which are based on social harmony - conflict with official concepts which emphasize justice and gender equality.

Traditional and religious leaders also talked about the difficulties in reconciling different aspects of the law. A district chief went on to say:

> "We, as a people, consider family life sacred. Whenever a family violence issue is reported, we are very cautious in handling it because taking such a matter to the police can be the end of the marriage. However, I admit that at times one of the parties fell unsatisfied with the traditional way of judging matters, especially the women."

This is a moral dilemma in which communal settlement is favored over formal adjudication, even in cases of extreme violence. The change is gradual but there are still contradictions and confusions.

Among the police officers, it was indicated that the lack of training on gender issues and scarce resources significantly hinder the performance of their duties. According to their major arguments the community volunteers are mostly very ignorant about domestic violence; they are unfamiliar with the procedures for gathering evidence and for protecting the survivors. They are well-meaning and want to be helpful but they have neither the knowledge nor the skills for the task. The women's advocacy groups equally acknowledged this point and they went on to say that the government's commitment to gender training is still very limited. On the other side, the community policing programs are heavily dependent on donor or NGO-led projects which are not stable and therefore not reliable.

In addition, social stigma makes the situation even worse. For example, a female respondent related her experience as follows:

> "Whenever a woman reports her husband, the neighbors start gossiping about her. She is often labeled as being rebellious or crazy. Therefore, many women who suffer in silence."

The endurance of these sorts of stories is just one of the ways in which social perception works as an informal deterrent, thereby preventing the victims from filing a complaint with the authorities even in the rare cases when they are equipped with the mechanisms to do so. The study therefore observes from these responses, that gender-responsive policing in Barkin Ladi is considerably weakened by the presence of a patriarchal culture that goes hand in hand with religious conservatism, the weakness of the police institution, and social stigma. Modest-sized community policing structures are morally governed by an economy that gives priority to social order and stability above the rights of women and thus, the institutional reporting and prosecution of cases of GBV are restricted. The few women in the policing committees, no formal gender training, and the poor liaison between the police on the local and formal levels are also factors that contribute to the continuation of the problem.

4.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.5.1. Community Policing Initiatives and the Prevention/Reporting of Gender-Based Violence

The findings suggest that community policing has become more visible and accepted in Barkin Ladi but its role in preventing and reporting gender-based violence (GBV) remains largely symbolic, and not transformative. This directly relates to the first objective of the study and is in line with the problem statement which questions the influence of the community policing structures, established in rural Plateau State, on gender-related crimes as being quite weak and irregular. The fact that few cases are reported and that many cases are solved informally through traditional systems shows that community policing still not breaking away from the patriarchal and cultural social norms that govern the social space of Barkin Ladi.While community awareness and police-resident interaction have improved, these developments have not resulted in gender justice. This is consistent with Arisukwu *et al*., (2020), who revealed that although community policing in Nigeria improves surveillance and trust, it still suffers from gender insensitivity and has a weak procedural integration into formal policing. Along with that, in Saadi and Massawe (2024) it is pointed out that the conventional reconciliation methods widespread in East Africa are still neglecting the protection of survivors just like in Barkin Ladi where the natives are more inclined to settle their issues privately through the traditional or religious leaders instead of the formally established institutions.

Such community practices, though culturally justified, deprive victims of legal redress, perpetuate silence and impunity and thus, Alobo and Obaji's (2016) moral paradox of community-based peace that promotes cohesion at the expense of gender harm continues to be relevant. The report also reveals that being conscious of something without having the necessary institutional capability only results in minor changes. Although the residents recognize community policing's positive role, the GBV reporting and follow-up channels are not properly strengthened. Due to stigma, backlash, or distrust of the system, several victims opt out of formal processes a situation Adeniran (2022) found whereby patriarchal punishments thwart women's attempts to seek justice and limit the gender sensitivity of grassroots policing.To this end, community policing in Barkin Ladi has not effected a change in the gender-power dynamics that are at the root of GBV.

On the institutional front, community policing kits seem to be continuously used for surveillance more than for the establishment of gender-responsive justice. This concurs with the problem statement which laments the fact that lack of gender training, poor coordination with law enforcement, and not having survivors as the focus in procedures has only served to make change difficult or even impossible. Onwudiwe (2021) and Okeke-Ihejirika *et al*., (2023) are also of the opinion that community policing in Nigeria is prone to replicating the patriarchal attitudes ingrained in the police culture, thereby it weakens its response to GBV.The effects are twofold. One, community policing is more of a tool for increasing awareness and moral deterrence than it is for scaled legal intervention when it comes to GBV prevention. A cultural change, albeit gradual, is underway as mistreatment and violence against women have now become topics of condemnation a phenomenon Olonisakin and Akinyele (2020) refer to as normative change that precedes institutional transformation. Two, there is a tremendous necessity for an institutional alignment between community policing units and formal justice systems. In the absence of this, local issues disappear into the net of informal arbitration, thus, the accountability is undermined.

As Fashola (2022) notes, many community policing models in Nigeria are at risk of being mere "gesture politics of inclusion" unless these are strengthened by gender training, enforceable structures, and government support. Community policing in Barkin Ladi, in summary, focuses more on the visibility side than it really deals with the substance of GBV prevention. It is a social bridging mechanism and not a justice mechanism working well for awareness-raising and crime fear reduction but not for breaking down the patriarchal and procedural barriers that deny women protection and redress. The findings thus reveal that community policing in rural Nigeria is still a reform project that is not yet polished, which requires deep institutional, gender, and cultural recalibration to serve as a credible tool for GBV prevention and justice delivery.

4.5.2 Perceptions of Stakeholders on the Effectiveness of Community Policing

The second objective of this study was to find out how stakeholders, such as community leaders, women's groups, and local law enforcement, view the effectiveness of community policing in dealing with gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi. It was found that stakeholders still view community policing as a trusted and legitimate way of ensuring safety, but its success in significantly reducing GBV is still limited. Such guarded optimism implies that community policing in Barkin Ladi has been symbolically recognized through societal acceptance, but it has not yet matured at the structural level. The public's trust is a reflection of the success of the participatory aspect of policing in terms of increasing the presence of and good relations between the residents and law enforcement.

On the other hand, deeply rooted gender inequalities continue to hamper its ability to transform the society completely, hence the generally low impact - a situation that is in line with the models of community policing in the African continent (Arisukwu *et al*., 2020; Nwokoro & Igbo, 2021). The findings made here also respond to the second objective and the problem statement in terms of the issue of perceptual ambivalence: that notwithstanding the support from the policy, community policing is still lacking in gender inclusiveness and credibility of the gender-sensitive outcomes. Traditional leaders and local inhabitants see community policing as something that can be done whereas women's groups view it as a male-dominated and secret operation which is also under-trained in handling GBV cases. Such difference in opinion resounds what Eze and Ajayi (2023) found, that trust between stakeholders is built more on the basis of familiarity than actual performance. In Barkin Ladi, the police officers who are from that very same cultural background which normalizes silence and reconciliation in GBV incidences continue to enforce norms of community policing that focus more on the use of mediation rather than on the administration of justice.

This situation is similar to what Adeniran (2022) and Onwudiwe (2021) report that community policing sometimes becomes a tool through which social hierarchies are maintained taking our focus away from the inequalities that we are trying to get rid of. Having traditional and religious leaders onboard has lead to smoother relations and also brought about greater adherence to the social order. However, it has also resulted in the re-emphasis of the patriarchal domination of decision-making. As in the case of Saadi and Massawe (2024) who made a study in Tanzania, these kinds of leaders enhance the acceptance of the community but at the same time, they compromise gender accountability because of the way they see GBV as a family issue rather than a criminal one. At the same time, the social authority that gives legitimacy to the policing also, through cultural arbitration, limits its gender responsiveness.

The makeup and representativeness of a community are some of the factors that contribute to their overall performance. Due to lack of female participation at decision-making levels, the community becomes less sensitive and responsive to the gender-specific risks of their environment. The work done by Afolabi *et al*., (2021) points out how women's involvement in the community policing efforts in the Nigerian rural areas is mostly limited to symbolic gestures and thus, they are not accorded any real power where decisions are made. As a result, the interventions are focused MORE on issues of security rather than with survivors a situation the qualitative evidence of this study has confirmed. The collaboration between the local police and communities has been strengthened. However, their efforts at the ground level are still marred by logistical and institutional problems. In the absence of the necessary resources, communication networks, and continuous support, the volunteers find it difficult to perform their duties effectively.

This situation is a faithful representation of the findings of Dambazau (2017) and Okeke-Ihejirika *et al*., (2023), who report that the low level of government investment keeps informal authority in a position of dependence and consequently limits their influence. Hence, community policing is legitimate but also fragile respected but without a strong foundation from the structural point of view. Looking at it from a gender angle, the difference between moral legitimacy and procedural justice still appears quite big. Although it is generally seen as being just and open to the public, due to the shortage of GBV training, the police officers end up in some cases playing the role of mediators whereby the female victims are being re-victimized or in other instances abuse being downgraded. The argument of Olonisakin and Akinyele (2020) is supported here where they say if there is no gender mainstreaming then participatory frameworks will end up being the very ones that reinforce rather than dismantle the existing hierarchies.

The implications of the study concern both theory and practice. On the theoretical level, it confirms the idea that legitimacy does not necessarily equal effectiveness; on the practical level, it highlights the urgency of adopting gender-sensitive institutionalization through representation/training and accountability. To make sure that women are able to make use of the power to influence the decisions on policing, inclusion should be based on competence only as Fashola (2022) maintains.

In summary, community policing in Barkin Ladi has achieved the objective of building trust and encouraging the participation of the people but it has not yet been able to translate acceptance into gender justice. The degree to which it has been effective is a reflection of the existing limiting factors in the structure, culture, and resources but also, it indicates a window of opportunity: the already established trust can be the basis for a gender-responsive reform. Community policing at present offers legitimacy rather than transformation, but still, it can develop into a viable, rights-based tool for the prevention of GBV in rural Nigeria.

4.5.3 Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Gender-Responsive Policing

The third objective identified institutional and socio-cultural barriers limiting community policing's effectiveness as a gender-responsive mechanism in Barkin Ladi. Results showed that patriarchal norms, cultural and religious ideologies, no gender-sensitive training at all, community-police formal coordination, and government support on top of that are the main reasons why gender-responsive policing in rural areas is undermined. This is the problem the study was trying to highlight by saying GBV will always be there if not only due to the absence of mechanisms but also because old social and institutional patterns that reproduce gender inequality in policing structures. Community policing is a good idea, but it is still under the influence of the same patriarchal values that keep women subordinated both in domestic and public spaces.

Patriarchy was the biggest barrier that kept coming up in different ways, for instance, the fact that women have a very limited role in policing, that the biggest preference is for private GBV resolution even though there is no doubt that police involvement is the last resort for such cases, and that there is a normalized silence among survivors. All these and more reveal how the gender hierarchy extends even to such things as the police practices.

This is a fact that Alobo and Obaji (2016) have confirmed when they said 'patriarchal culture of Northern Nigeria allows GBV to be understood as a domestic issue and not as a criminal one'. Along the same lines, Saadi and Massawe (2024) also found that in Tanzania, social beliefs about violence acting as discipline are the main reason why women do not want to seek justice. The Barkin Ladi case is a perfect example of the situation in all of Africa where community policing is subservient to gendered moral economies that prioritize cohesion over justice. Institutionally, weak coordination and capacity gaps hamper GBV response. The interviewees revealed that volunteers of the community policing which presently make up the bulk of the community policy force lack training, equipment, and support, therefore, they have reinforced the argument of Arisukwu *et al*., (2020) who considered community policing as part of the 'quasi-security' sector, a situation that leads to lack of clear referral mechanisms, which almost always leads to mismanagement of GBV cases or at best, these cases are dealt with informally without any accountability. Attributing to their authority, traditional and religious leaders, however, limit their gender responsiveness, which is referred to as the "dual legitimacy problem". Their focus on reconciliation and family harmony is consistent with Adeniran's (2022) argument that traditional governance structures can maintain peace yet silence victims.

The religious influences further perpetuate the acceptance of GBV; quoting Onwudiwe (2021), "faith-based teachings emphasizing patience and forgiveness are often used to justify women's tolerance of abuse." The lack of gender-sensitivity training worsens the social barriers, coupled with institutional ineptitude. Officers end up interpreting GBV cases more on cultural rather than legal grounds, thus resulting in scattered case handling. Okeke-Ihejirika *et al*., (2023) are of the same opinion as they discovered that the curricula of police academies hardly cover the gender aspect, which leads to "masculinized policing cultures." Therefore, gender responsiveness entails a conscious and gradual institutionalization through policy, training, and representation. Insufficient government funding has left community policing to rely on volunteer works, thus no sustainability and accountability. Dambazau (2017) and Fashola (2022) pointed out that state coordination is so weak that such community-initiated projects are only symbolic and mere exercises for surveillance rather than for the pursuit of justice. The community-policing initiative in Barkin Ladi has all the ingredients of trust and awareness but without the required resources and supervision, the progress is very limited.

Therefore, institutional weaknesses and socio-cultural resistance are mutual reinforcements cultural norms legitimize the institutional inertia, whereas poor capacity at institutional level continues to exclude gender. The change has therefore to be structural as well as ideological. As argued by Olonisakin and Akinyele (2020), peace and security go far beyond just inclusion of women and demand the disruption of patriarchal logic. Therefore, the community policing in Barkin Ladi is still deeply rooted in a traditional social system where the emphasis is on peace over justice and male authority over equality. Its outward participatory nature is in fact an exclusionary form of practice. Gender-responsive policing is fundamentally about cultural change accompanied by the enforcement of the law and that local legitimacy should go hand in hand with institutional accountability.

5.1 Policy Implications

From the findings of this study, it is believed that stakeholders on gender-sensitive security policy, community policing reforms, and rural governance in Nigeria will have relevant information. The findings reveal that community policing has delivered public confidence and local participation in Barkin Ladi, but at the same time, its ability to effectively prevent and respond to cases of gender-based violence (GBV) is still largely limited due to weak institutions and

socio-cultural barriers. Hence, the policy implications are not confined to policing practices only but also encompass the larger fields of justice delivery, social reorientation, and gender governance.

Institutional Strengthening of Community Policing Structures:

As community policing in Barkin Ladi works with very little coordination, funding, and technical support from formal law enforcement institutions, the findings reveal that it is a very loosely organized system that depends more on voluntary commitment rather than institutional sustainability. To make community policing really work against GBV, it should be recognized as part of Nigeria's formal security arrangement which it has become, with a clear set of operating procedures, accountability measures, and provision of appropriate funding. Security policies at the national and state levels should make the establishment of gender desks in community policing committees mandatory and these committees should work closely with the Divisional Police Headquarters and the Ministry of Women Affairs. Such a setup will ensure that cases of GBV follow a clear and traceable process of referral, investigation, and response thereby minimizing cases being lost through informal settlements.

Gender Mainstreaming and Representation:

The study has brought to light a significant policy gap - the gender imbalance in community policing structures. Perpetuating gender-blind responses to violence is the absence of women in security decision-making. Therefore, policy reform should be directed at a gender-inclusive approach by means of affirmative action, in which women from the existing women's associations, market unions, and faith-based organizations make up at least 40% of the community policing committee members. Also, female officers should also be in community-policing liaison roles especially in rural areas where they can be the first point of contact for survivors thereby facilitating trust and encouraging survivors to come forward. Having women on board is not only for show; it also helps in aspects such as empathy, confidentiality, and culturally appropriate handling of GBV cases.

Capacity Building and Gender-Sensitivity Training:

Police officers and community volunteers lack special knowledge of the dynamics of GBV as evidenced by the research results. Therefore, a detailed training on gender-responsive policing is expected to be added to the training curriculum of the national police academies and local capacity-building programs. There should be a partnership between the National Human Rights Commission and UN Women, with the Nigeria Police Force to develop modular training programs that cover areas like victim-centered investigation, trauma-informed interviewing, and ethical mediation practices. In addition to these, there should be refresher workshops for traditional and religious leaders to align cultural authority with human rights standards. In fact, the evidence from Okeke-Ihejirika *et al*., (2023) and Saadi & Massawe (2024) proves that after the training, officers became more sensitive and secondary victimization was reduced.

Integrating Traditional Authority into Formal GBV Governance:

Traditional and religious leaders are still very influential in managing GBV cases as the study indicates. Hence, policy should not disregard these leaders but instead formalize their role through hybrid justice models that bring together customary mediation and statutory law. One way of doing this is through a Community Justice Coordination Framework (CJCF), which is a framework that involves training and certifying local leaders as mediators of non-criminal domestic issues only, whereas cases of physical or sexual violence must be referred to the authorities. This hybrid model has worked well in other African countries (Mugisha & Katushabe, 2021) and it can provide a balance between cultural legitimacy and legal accountability in Nigeria.

Addressing Social Norms and Public Awareness:

Apart from the policing reform, the government must also take a critical and decisive look at the social structure of patriarchy that allows silence and stigma around GBV in Barkin Ladi to continue through community sensitizations, youth engagement, and faith-based advocacy. Gender Justice Dialogue Platforms can be government and civil society initiatives at the ward level. Radio drama, school programs, and religious forums can all be used as means of challenging harmful gender stereotypes. Furthermore, campaigns should be geared towards the criminality of GBV, survivors' legal rights, and men as partners in crime prevention. Over time this cultural reorientation will change the normative framework within which community policing functions.

Funding and Inter-Agency Coordination:

The lack of resources in Barkin Ladi as observed can be addressed only if a separate fund is set up for gender-responsive community policing. A combined budget from the Ministry of Police Affairs, the Plateau State Ministry of Women Affairs, and Local Government Councils should be allocated to cover the expenses of logistics, training, and public awareness campaigns. Besides that, a platform for multi-sectoral coordination comprising the police, Ministry of Justice, civil society, and donor agencies

should be established to oversee the implementation and share GBV data. Through these kinds of arrangements, community policing can cease to be a volunteer activity and become a legitimate component of inclusive security governance.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This research explores the extent to which community policing affected the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) in Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, Plateau State. Besides, it considered how community policing has facilitated the awareness, prevention, and reporting of GBV, how the different actors in the area view the effectiveness of these initiatives, and which institutional and socio-cultural factors hinder gender-responsive policing in rural areas. Community policing is credited with deeply involving locals in the security management and thus leading to the improvement of the relations and trust between the police and the communities; however, its direct effect on the prevention of GBV has been very limited. People have become more aware of the activities of the community police but the systems for reporting GBV, responding, and protecting survivors are very weak and are not always followed. Women still have less access to the community policing platforms and society's cultural norms still favor the private settlement of GBV cases rather than formal justice. Hence, the current model is a kind of policing inclusive in structure but gender-blind in practice.

On the other hand, the data reveal that community policing is a factor in changing the discourse on violence against women. There is an ever-increasing exchange of ideas and views on women's issues involving law enforcement officers, traditional leaders, and women's groups which means that the community has at its disposal the first steps for gender-sensitive security reform. Leveraging this local trust and commitment could be the path to restorative and socially transformative justice. The study thus indicates that the effectiveness of community policing in the prevention of GBV hinges not only on community participation but also on the institutional support, gender inclusiveness, and cultural reorientation that are inherent in its framework. For a real change to occur, there must be a bridging of the divide between traditional authority and statutory law, between awareness and enforcement, and between legitimacy and accountability.

This, therefore, means that the experience of community policing in Barkin Ladi reflects at the same time a source of hope and a predicament: polarization through patriarchal gender norms is a limiting factor that the authorities have to live with, yet it is also a potent means by which they mobilize and coordinate The community in the fight against crime and disorder. This contradiction could be resolved by, among other things, empowering women in the community policing structures, enhancing the skill levels of police officers, and integrating the community efforts with the formal justice institutions. In the end, the research illustrates that the issue of transforming community policing to be more gender-responsive in the rural areas of Nigeria includes much more than just policy changes - it involves rethinking and changing the relationships that cross genders, communities, government and culture, at the core of which the long-term prevention of gender-based violence will rely.

Appendix

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaire on the Impact of Community Policing on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention in Barkin Ladi LGA

Section A: Demographic Information

(Please tick ✓ the appropriate option)

Variable	**Options**
Gender:	Male ( ) Female ( )
Age:	18–29 ( ) 30–39 ( ) 40–49 ( ) 50 and above ( )
Marital Status:	Single ( ) Married ( ) Widowed ( ) Divorced ( )
Occupation:	Police/Vigilante ( ) Community Leader ( ) Women's Group Member ( ) Other (specify) _____
Level of Education:	No formal education ( ) Primary ( ) Secondary ( ) Tertiary ( )
Years of Residence in the Community:	Less than 5 ( ) 5–10 ( ) 11–15 ( ) Over 15 ( )

Section B: Issues on community policing and gender based violence

Scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
Community Policing Initiatives and the Prevention/Reporting of GBV					
1	Community policing activities are well known among residents in Barkin Ladi.				
2	Community policing officers regularly sensitize the public on the dangers of GBV.				
3	There are established mechanisms within community policing to report GBV cases.				
4	Community policing has increased community members' willingness to report GBV incidents.				
5	The collaboration between police officers and traditional leaders has reduced GBV in the area.				
6	Community policing initiatives have improved the safety of women and girls in Barkin Ladi.				
7	Victims of GBV now report incidents more freely due to the presence of community policing officers.				
8	GBV cases are followed up to conclusion through community policing structures.				
Perceptions of Stakeholders on the Effectiveness of Community Policing					
9	Community members perceive community policing as a trusted mechanism for ensuring safety.				
10	Women's groups are adequately represented in community policing committees.				
11	Traditional and religious leaders cooperate effectively with community policing officers.				
12	Police-community partnerships have strengthened local trust in GBV prevention efforts.				
13	Community policing officers are adequately trained to handle GBV-related cases.				
14	The police and community policing volunteers treat GBV cases with fairness and sensitivity.				
15	Community policing has led to improved coordination between law enforcement and the community in GBV prevention.				
16	Stakeholders believe community policing has been effective in reducing GBV in Barkin Ladi.				
Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Gender-Responsive Policing					
17	Patriarchal norms in the community hinder women's participation in policing and justice processes.				
18	Cultural beliefs discourage survivors from reporting GBV incidents.				
19	Some traditional leaders prefer to settle GBV cases privately rather than report to authorities.				
20	Lack of gender-sensitivity training among police officers limits the effectiveness of GBV response.				
21	Inadequate coordination between community policing committees and formal police units weakens GBV interventions.				
22	Fear of social stigma prevents victims from cooperating with community policing officers.				
23	Limited government support affects the sustainability of gender-sensitive community policing programs.				
24	Religious beliefs sometimes justify silence or tolerance of GBV acts.				

Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

Participants: Police/community policing officers, community leaders, and women's group leaders.

Purpose: To explore in-depth perceptions of the role of community policing in preventing and responding to gender-based violence in Barkin Ladi LGA.

Section A: Community Policing and GBV Prevention

1. How would you describe the role of community policing in preventing and responding to GBV in your community?
2. What specific activities have community policing groups carried out to prevent GBV?
3. Can you describe any changes in GBV reporting since the introduction of community policing?
4. What structures exist for reporting GBV incidents through community policing channels?

Section B: Perceptions of Stakeholders on Effectiveness

5. How do community members perceive the performance of community policing in GBV prevention?
6. In terms of being active or inactive, can you describe the participation of women's groups and traditional leaders in community policing initiatives?
7. How effective is the contribution of women's groups and traditional leaders in community policing initiatives??
8. What is your opinion about the training and preparedness of community policing officers to handle GBV cases?
9. To what extent has community policing enhanced community trust and cooperation with formal law enforcement agencies?

Section C: Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers

9. What major institutional barriers affect the effectiveness of community policing in addressing GBV?
10. How do cultural or traditional norms influence the reporting and handling of GBV cases?
11. Can you highlight examples of community attitudes or practices that discourage women from seeking justice?
12. How can the cooperation between police officers, women's groups, and traditional leaders be improved to overcome these barriers?
13. What specific reforms or strategies would you recommend to make community policing more gender-responsive and effective in GBV prevention?

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