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# CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA AND DECLINING FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF A HIDDEN RELATIONSHIP

**Taye SUNDAY & Raymond KUTEYI**
**talk2kute2024@gmail.com**
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**
**GEJ COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**
**IGBINEDION UNIVERSITY OKADA, EDO STATE**

## Abstract

**Background:** Crime and violence against women constitute major barriers to gender equality, human security, economic independence and sustainable development in Nigeria. Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to gender-based violence and women's labour-force participation separately, less attention has been given to the possibility that women's experiences or perceptions of violence may influence their decisions to enter, remain in, or withdraw from paid employment and economically productive activities.

**Aim**: This study qualitatively explored the hidden relationship between crime against women and female labour-force participation in Nigeria.

**Methods:** The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design based on a critical review and thematic synthesis of existing empirical studies, national surveys, institutional reports and relevant scholarly literature. The analysis was guided by feminist political economy and the empowerment perspective, which conceptualised violence against women and economic exclusion as mutually reinforcing manifestations of unequal gender relations.

**Results**: The study found that women's economic empowerment may have a complex relationship with violence. Increased income and participation can strengthen women's bargaining power and capacity to leave abusive relationships, but may also provoke resistance or backlash where patriarchal norms perceive women's economic independence as a threat to established gender roles. Nigerian evidence from the Nigeria for Women Project similarly indicates that empowerment interventions need to anticipate and mitigate GBV risks. The paper concludes that crime against women should not be treated solely as a criminal-justice or public-health problem. It is also an economic development problem because violence can reduce women's mobility, productivity, employment opportunities and economic independence. Policies designed to increase female labour-force participation should therefore be integrated with GBV prevention, survivor-centred services, safe transportation, workplace protection, access to justice, childcare, financial inclusion and community-level transformation of harmful gender norms.

**Keywords:** crime violence, female labour force participation, women's economic empowerment, Nigeria, patriarchy, economic exclusion,

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**Introduction**

Women's participation in productive economic activity is fundamental to household welfare, poverty reduction and sustainable national development. Women's engagement in paid employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship and other forms of productive work contributes not only to household income but also to human-capital development, children's welfare and broader economic growth ( Brown et al 2024) Yet, women's participation in the Nigerian economy remains shaped by persistent inequalities in access to employment, productive assets, finance, markets, education, social protection and decision-making. Recent World Bank gender data indicate that although women's labour-force participation in Nigeria is substantial, a pronounced gender gap remains: in 2024, the labour-force participation rate was about 80.7% for women aged 15 and above compared with 84.4% for men, while women were considerably more concentrated in vulnerable forms of employment. These patterns suggest that the issue is not merely whether Nigerian women participate in economic activity, but also the conditions, security, quality and sustainability of such participation (World bank 2025).

One factor that warrants greater scholarly attention in explaining women's economic vulnerability is violence against women (VAW). Violence against women encompasses physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as coercive and controlling behaviours that restrict women's autonomy and freedom. The World Health Organization (WHO) continues to identify violence against women as a major public-health and human-rights problem rooted in gender inequality. Its most recent global estimates indicate that approximately one in three women globally—about 840 million women—have experienced partner or sexual violence during their lifetime. The WHO further reports that progress in reducing intimate-partner violence has been extremely slow, with the global prevalence remaining persistently high. Violence therefore represents not only a criminal-justice concern but also a major constraint on women's health, autonomy, social participation and economic well-being. (WHO 2024) .

The Nigerian context is particularly important because violence against women occurs within a wider environment characterisedy by socioeconomic inequality, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, unequal gender norms and differential access to economic resources. The 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) provides some of the most recent nationally representative evidence on the problem. The 2024 NDHS found

that approximately 21% of women aged 15–49 had ever experienced physical or sexual violence. Among women who had experienced such violence, only 24% sought help, while 18% did not seek help but told someone about their experience. (National Population Commission 2025). In contrast, 58% neither sought help nor told anyone. This high level of non-disclosure has important implications for understanding the relationship between crime and women's economic participation. Administrative crime statistics are likely to underestimate the actual magnitude of violence because many incidents remain hidden within households, intimate relationships and communities. Fear of retaliation, economic dependence, stigma, social expectations, limited knowledge of support services and distrust of formal institutions may all discourage survivors from reporting abuse (World bank 2025).

Current World Bank data show that women continue to experience disadvantages in the quality and security of employment, including a high concentration in vulnerable employment and relatively low representation among wage and salaried workers. These disadvantages can make women more economically exposed to shocks arising from violence. For example, a woman whose livelihood depends on daily trading, petty commerce, farming or casual employment may have little capacity to absorb income losses resulting from injury, psychological distress, relocation or partner-imposed restrictions. Thus, the consequences of violence may be particularly severe for women whose livelihoods depend on continuous physical presence and informal economic networks.

It is therefore important to conceptualise crime against women and female labour-force participation as potentially interconnected social and economic processes rather than as isolated problems. Violence may operate through several pathways: physical injury may reduce work capacity; psychological trauma may undermine productivity and confidence; sexual violence may produce health and reproductive consequences; coercive control may restrict mobility and employment choices; and economic dependence may increase women's vulnerability to continued abuse. At the same time, employment and income may influence women's bargaining power, access to social networks and capacity to exit abusive relationships. This suggests a potentially reciprocal relationship in which violence can constrain women's economic participation while economic dependence can increase exposure to violence.

Despite the importance of this relationship,

much of the Nigerian literature has examined violence against women primarily from public-health, human-rights, criminological or demographic perspectives, while studies of women's labour-force participation have generally focused on education, fertility, childcare, household responsibilities, access to finance, cultural norms and labour-market conditions. The economic consequences of violence, particularly its potential implications for women's ability to participate consistently and productively in the labour market, have received comparatively less integrated attention. A qualitative synthesis is therefore valuable because it can bring together evidence from different disciplines and illuminate the mechanisms through which violence and economic participation may interact.

Against this background, the present study examines the relationship between crime and violence against women and female labour-force participation in Nigeria through a qualitative synthesis of existing empirical and institutional evidence. Rather than assuming a simple causal relationship, the study considers the multiple pathways through which violence may influence women's economic participation and the ways in which women's economic position may shape their vulnerability, coping strategies and ability to respond to violence. The study consequently contributes to the growing literature on gender, crime and development by situating violence against women within the broader question of women's economic empowerment and Nigeria's inclusive development agenda.

**Objective of the study**

The general objective of this study is to qualitatively examine the relationship between crime against women and female labour-force participation in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the major forms of crime and violence experienced by women in Nigeria;
2. explore how violence affects women's ability and willingness to participate in the labour market;
3. examine the mechanisms through which violence restricts women's economic mobility;
4. investigate how patriarchal norms and intimate-partner control influence women's employment decisions;
5. examine the relationship between women's economic empowerment and vulnerability to violence.

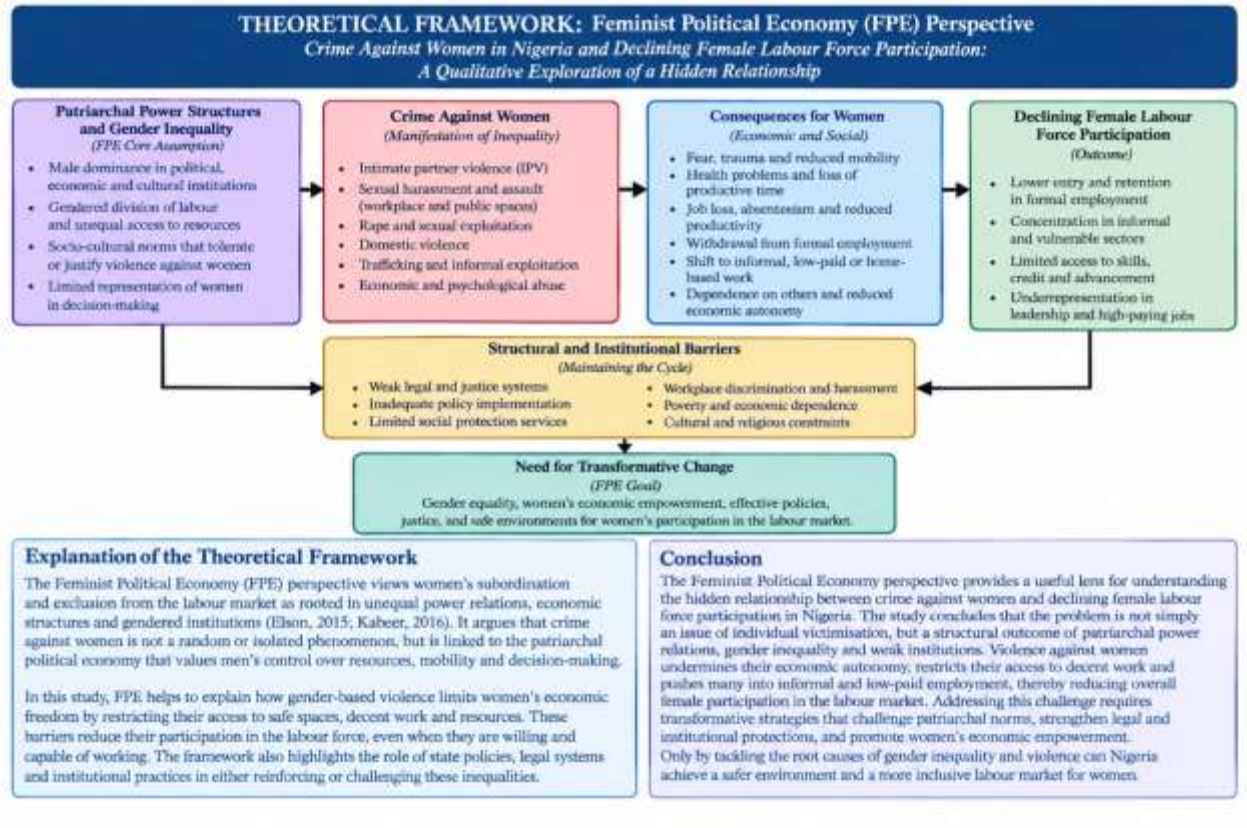
**Theoretical framework**

*Feminist Political Economy (FPE) Perspective*

The study is anchored primarily in the Feminist Political Economy (FPE) Perspective, which provides a useful framework for examining the interconnected relationship between patriarchy, women's economic participation, intimate-partner control and violence against women in Nigeria. Feminist political economy argues that economic outcomes cannot be separated from social relations, gender norms, household power structures and institutional arrangements. Women's economic position is shaped not only by market forces but also by unpaid care responsibilities, patriarchal expectations, unequal ownership of resources and gendered power relations. Feminist political economy challenges conventional economic approaches that treat employment, income and labour-market participation as individual or market-based outcomes. Instead, it emphasizes that economic behaviour is embedded within social relations, gender norms, household structures, institutions and unequal distributions of power and resources.

Applied to this study, the Feminist Political Economy Perspective therefore proposes that women's labour-force participation and vulnerability to violence are jointly produced through gendered economic and social relations. Patriarchal norms establish expectations concerning women's roles; household power relations determine access to employment and resources; intimate-partner control can restrict women's economic choices; and violence can subsequently reinforce women's economic dependence. At the same time, employment and economic empowerment can increase women's bargaining power and potentially challenge existing gender hierarchies.

The perspective consequently provides a strong theoretical basis for investigating how patriarchal norms, intimate-partner control, women's economic empowerment and violence interact to shape women's employment decisions in Nigeria. It moves the analysis beyond viewing women as passive victims or individual economic actors and instead situates their choices within broader structures of power, production, reproduction and inequality.




**Methodology**

The study adopted an **exploratory qualitative research design** to investigate the relationship between crime against women and female labour-force participation in Nigeria. The design was appropriate because the study sought to explain the social, economic, cultural and institutional mechanisms through which violence may affect women's employment opportunities, decisions and capacity. Rather than concentrating only on statistical associations, the methodology examined the interaction between violence, gender norms, household power relations and economic dependence.

The study was guided by the **Feminist Political Economy Perspective**, which situates women's economic outcomes within gender relations, household structures, unpaid care responsibilities, access to resources and institutional arrangements. This framework strengthens the study by interpreting violence not simply as an interpersonal or criminal-justice problem but as a factor capable of reinforcing economic dependence and gender inequality. It is therefore useful for explaining how violence can restrict women's mobility, employment, income and economic decision-making.

A **qualitative documentary research and thematic synthesis** approach was employed using secondary evidence. Sources included peer-reviewed studies, national surveys, government documents and reports from reputable organisations such as the World Bank, ILO, WHO and United Nations agencies. Recent literature, particularly from 2020–2026, was prioritised, while relevant foundational theoretical studies were retained. Literature was selected according to its relevance to violence against women, employment, economic empowerment, gender relations and household decision-making.

Data were systematically extracted and analysed thematically. Key themes included **employment restriction, economic dependence, control of earnings, mobility restrictions, unpaid care work, sexual harassment, fear of violence, occupational insecurity and patriarchal expectations**. The analysis particularly examined how violence may constrain labour-force participation while also recognising that employment and economic empowerment can strengthen women's bargaining power. This bidirectional interpretation is a major methodological strength because it avoids assuming that violence always causes employment withdrawal or that employment automatically produces empowerment. Trustworthiness was enhanced through comparison of evidence from academic, governmental and institutional sources, alongside clearly defined selection criteria and systematic thematic analysis. Ethical principles included accurate representation of evidence, appropriate citation and avoidance of victim-blaming.

However, the methodology has limitations. Because it relies entirely on secondary qualitative evidence, it **cannot establish statistical causality** between violence and declining female labour-force participation. Under-reporting of violence, differences in definitions and variations in study populations may also affect comparability. Nevertheless, the methodology provides a credible basis for identifying the hidden social, economic and institutional mechanisms through which violence, patriarchal relations and economic dependence may constrain women's participation in Nigeria's labour market.

### Major Forms of Crime and Violence Experienced by Women in Nigeria

Crime and violence against women in Nigeria constitute a multidimensional social, human-rights, public-health and economic problem. Contemporary Nigerian evidence (Adams et al 2023) shows that violence occurs in both private

and public spaces. and includes intimate-partner and domestic violence, sexual violence and rape, sexual harassment, harmful traditional practices, child and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking and exploitation, conflict-related and communal violence, kidnapping and abduction, and emerging forms of technology-facilitated violence. These forms of violence frequently overlap, with poverty, displacement, insecurity, patriarchal norms and women's limited access to justice increasing vulnerability (Fawole 2024).

Intimate-partner violence (IPV) remains one of the most widespread forms of violence against Nigerian women. It includes physical assault, sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, threats, intimidation, controlling behaviour and, in some cases, economic abuse. The most recent 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) provides important national evidence: among women who had ever been married or had an intimate partner, 23% had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their current or most recent partner. Emotional violence was the most commonly reported form of IPV (19%), followed by physical violence (13%) and sexual violence (4%). (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey2024)

The evidence also demonstrates that IPV is particularly severe among women who are divorced, separated or widowed, among whom the prevalence of violence by a current or most recent partner was reported at 41%. This suggests that marital breakdown and women's attempts to exit abusive relationships may intersect with experiences of violence.

Domestic violence is also reflected in contemporary human-rights monitoring. For example, the National Human Rights Commission's July 2026 dashboard recorded 3,426 complaints of domestic violence, alongside cases of rape and sexual abuse. Although administrative complaints cannot be interpreted as prevalence estimates, they demonstrate the continuing significance of domestic violence in Nigeria (National Human Rights Commission. 2026).

Sexual violence represents another major category of violence against women and girls in Nigeria. It includes rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact and other forms of non-consensual sexual activity. According to the 2024 NDHS, 5% of Nigerian women aged 15–49 had experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives, while 3% had experienced sexual violence during the previous 12 months. The

prevalence was particularly notable among women who had never married but had previously had an intimate partner (12%) and among divorced, separated or widowed women (11%). Sexual violence is also significant within conflict-affected communities. UNFPA reports that ongoing conflict, displacement and insecurity in northeastern Nigeria increase the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence and exploitation.

Nigeria's Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP Act) criminalises rape and provides penalties and remedies for victims. It also addresses other forms of violence and harmful practices. Nevertheless, the existence of legislation does not automatically eliminate violence, particularly where reporting, investigation, prosecution and access to survivor services remain inadequate

Sexual harassment is another important but often underreported form of violence. It occurs in workplaces, schools, universities, markets, public transportation and other public or institutional environments. Women may experience unwanted sexual advances, sexually suggestive comments, requests for sexual favours, inappropriate touching, threats, coercion or retaliation for refusing sexual demands. Sexual harassment can be particularly damaging to women's economic participation because it can influence occupational choices, job retention, promotion and willingness to work in particular environments. The contemporary international policy literature increasingly treats sexual harassment alongside domestic violence, child marriage and femicide as a major women's safety concern. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* framework specifically identifies sexual harassment as one of the major forms of violence requiring legal and institutional protection. In the Nigerian context, sexual harassment should therefore be regarded not merely as inappropriate workplace behaviour but as a structural barrier to women's educational, professional and economic advancement (Nwabunike & Tenkorang. 2025).

**How Violence Affects Women's Participation in Employment and Economic Activities in Nigeria**

Violence against women is increasingly recognised not only as a human-rights and public-health problem but also as an important constraint on women's economic participation. In Nigeria, violence can affect women's ability to enter, remain in and progress within employment and other income-generating activities through several interconnected mechanisms, including **physical and psychological injury, fear and insecurity, restricted mobility, intimate-partner control,**

**workplace harassment, loss of productive assets, absenteeism, reduced productivity and economic dependence**. Recent Nigerian evidence provides particularly strong support for this relationship.

Evidence shows that Violence remains a constraint on Women's Labour-Market Participation. The most direct evidence comes from Brown et al. (2024), who examined the association between intimate-partner violence (IPV) and women's labour-market outcomes in Nigeria using national survey and conflict data. Their findings indicate that women who had experienced physical, emotional or any form of IPV were more likely to withdraw from the labour market. The researchers estimated an average **4.14% reduction in the likelihood of working** associated with IPV exposure, corresponding to almost **US$3 billion in annual lost productivity,** approximately 1% of Nigeria's economic output. A 2026 Nigerian study using **23,566 ever-married women from the 2023/2024 NDHS** found that severe domestic violence was negatively associated with women's employment, although the direct association was only marginally statistically significant. Importantly, the study found that the relationship varied according to socioeconomic circumstances: wealth appeared to buffer some of the employment penalty associated with violence, while education, rural residence and other socioeconomic characteristics altered the relationship. These findings suggest that violence does not affect all women in exactly the same way. Its economic consequences are conditioned by women's education, wealth, location, household circumstances and access to alternative livelihood opportunities.

One of the principal ways violence affects women's economic participation is through **fear of physical or sexual violence.** Employment and entrepreneurship often require women to travel to workplaces, markets, farms, customers, suppliers, financial institutions and training centres. Where women perceive these spaces or transportation routes as unsafe, they may restrict their movements or avoid particular employment opportunities. This is especially relevant in Nigeria's informal economy, where many women work as traders, farmers, artisans, food vendors and small-scale entrepreneurs. Unlike formal employees who may work in fixed locations, informal workers often have to move between markets, suppliers and customers (National Human Rights Commission.2026).

Violence can directly affect women's physical health through injuries, chronic pain,

disability and other health consequences. These effects can reduce women's capacity to undertake physically demanding employment and economic activities. For women working in agriculture, petty trading, domestic work, manufacturing or other informal occupations, even temporary physical incapacity may result in significant income losses because they often lack paid sick leave or employment protection. The 2024 NDHS provides evidence of the continuing prevalence of violence among Nigerian women, while the survey also demonstrates that violence is embedded within broader inequalities affecting women's empowerment and employment. Consequently, the economic effect of violence may extend beyond the immediate loss of working days. Repeated violence can undermine women's long-term capacity to maintain stable employment or develop businesses. A particularly important mechanism in Nigeria is **controlling behaviour by intimate partners** (Nwabunike &Tenkorang (2025).

Violence may occur through direct restrictions on women's employment. An abusive partner may; prohibit a woman from working; determine where she can work; prevent her from travelling to work; take control of her salary; prevent her from establishing a business; confiscate business profits; restrict access to bank accounts; or threaten violence if she becomes economically independent. Such behaviour transforms violence into a mechanism of economic control. The 2024 NDHS indicates that employment is already an important dimension of women's empowerment in Nigeria: **66% of married women aged 15–49 had been employed during the preceding 12 months,** and among those earning cash, 91% participated in decisions about how their earnings were spent. However, 86% reported earning less than their husbands. This demonstrates that employment does not necessarily mean complete economic autonomy. Women's control over income and household decision-making remains important.

Violence can also affect women's ability to establish and expand businesses. Entrepreneurship requires mobility, access to finance, control over income, networking and interaction with customers and suppliers. Controlling partners may restrict these activities. Economic violence can also involve preventing women from controlling their own earnings or accessing financial institutions. The World Bank reports that Nigerian women continue to face substantial financial-inclusion barriers. Its Nigeria for Women Project notes that women's access to formal financial services has historically been

considerably lower than men's, particularly among rural women. This means that violence-related economic control can compound pre-existing structural barriers. A woman who already has limited access to formal banking, credit and property ownership may have fewer resources with which to resist financial abuse.

**Mechanisms Through Which Violence Restricts Women's Economic Mobility in Nigeria**

Violence against women in Nigeria should be understood not only as a human-rights, public-health and security problem, but also as a significant constraint on **women's economic mobility**. Economic mobility refers to women's ability to enter employment, retain jobs, improve their occupational position, increase earnings, own and control productive assets, establish businesses, access financial services and move from economic dependence toward greater financial independence. Recent Nigerian evidence (Olalude, et al. 2025). indicates that violence can undermine these processes through interconnected mechanisms involving **mobility restrictions, physical and psychological harm, economic control, loss of productive time, workplace insecurity, destruction of assets, social norms, reduced access to opportunities and economic dependence.**

The relationship is particularly important in Nigeria because women's economic participation is already constrained by unequal access to finance, education, productive assets and secure employment. The 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reports that 66% of married women aged 15–49 were employed during the preceding 12 months, but 86% of employed married women who earned cash reported earning less than their husbands. The survey also shows substantial gender differences in household decision-making and asset ownership.

One of the most important mechanisms through which violence restricts economic mobility is the restriction of women's **physical movement**. Employment and entrepreneurship require women to move between homes, workplaces, markets, farms, customers, suppliers, financial institutions and training centres. Fear of assault, sexual harassment, kidnapping, intimate-partner violence and community insecurity can therefore influence where, when and whether women travel for economic purposes. This mechanism is particularly important in Nigeria's informal economy, where women are heavily represented in trading, agriculture, food processing, petty commerce and other activities requiring regular movement (Balogun et al 2026).

A second mechanism is **coercive control by intimate partners**. Violence within relationships is not necessarily limited to physical assault. A partner may control where a woman works, whom she interacts with, how much she earns and how she spends her income. A violent partner may: prevent a woman from obtaining employment; insist that she resign from her job; restrict her working hours; prevent her from travelling to work; prohibit particular occupations; confiscate her salary; control her business income; or prevent her from establishing an independent business. The significance of this mechanism is supported by recent Nigerian research linking IPV with labour-market outcomes. Brown et al. (2024) found that Nigerian women exposed to physical, emotional or any IPV were more likely to withdraw from the labour market. Their analysis estimated a **4.14% average reduction in the likelihood of working**, corresponding to almost **US$3 billion in annual lost productivity**.

Economic abuse may involve preventing women from earning money, controlling their wages, denying them access to bank accounts, taking business profits, destroying property or preventing ownership of productive assets. Even when a woman is employed, therefore, employment may not automatically produce economic independence. The 2024 NDHS illustrates this distinction. Although 66% of married women aged 15–49 were employed during the preceding year, **86% of employed married women who earned cash reported earning less than their husbands**. This demonstrates why research on economic mobility should examine not only whether women work but also **who controls the income generated from that work**. Economic abuse can therefore create a situation in which: **Employment exists → income is generated → partner controls income → economic autonomy remains limited.**

Violence also affects economic mobility through psychological consequences. Repeated exposure to threats, humiliation, intimidation, sexual violence and physical assault can contribute to anxiety, depression, fear, trauma and reduced self-confidence. These consequences can affect: concentration; decision-making; workplace performance; entrepreneurial initiative; attendance; interpersonal relationships; willingness to seek promotion; and ability to plan for the future. The economic consequences of violence therefore extend beyond physical injuries. The World Bank's gender data evidence identifies physical and mental-health consequences and reduced productivity as important economic effects of

gender-based violence. This is particularly relevant to economic mobility because progression from low-income to higher-income employment often requires confidence, networking, risk-taking, training and willingness to pursue new opportunities. Psychological trauma may weaken these capacities (Adejumo, et al. 2025).

.A particularly important mechanism in Nigeria is **gender-norm backlash**. Women's economic empowerment can increase income, bargaining power and independence. However, where traditional expectations define men as household economic providers and women as economically dependent, women's increasing economic autonomy can challenge established power relations. Research associated with the Nigeria for Women Project identified the possibility that women's economic empowerment could increase GBV risks in the short term if household and community gender norms do not change simultaneously. More recent World Bank reporting confirms that the Nigeria for Women Project incorporated behaviour-change communication, engagement with religious and traditional leaders and survivor-centred GBV services because changing women's economic roles can produce resistance from partners, families and communities. Thus, economic empowerment can have two potential effects: **Empowerment → greater autonomy → reduced long-term vulnerability** but potentially: **Empowerment → challenge to patriarchal authority → backlash → short-term increase in violence.** This explains why economic programmes should be accompanied by interventions addressing men's attitudes, household decision-making and community gender norms.

**Patriarchal Norms, Intimate-Partner Control and Women's Employment Decisions in Nigeria**

Patriarchal norms remain an important social and institutional factor shaping women's employment decisions in Nigeria. Although Nigerian women increasingly participate in paid employment, entrepreneurship, agriculture, professional occupations and informal economic activities, their decisions about whether to work, where to work, the type of employment to accept, and how much time to devote to paid work are frequently embedded within gendered household expectations. Patriarchy generally privileges men as household heads, economic providers and final decision-makers, while assigning women primary responsibility for childcare, domestic work and family care. Recent Nigerian evidence suggests that these expectations continue to influence women's labour-market participation and can

interact with intimate-partner control to constrain women's economic autonomy.

The literature suggests several interconnected mechanisms through which patriarchal norms and intimate-partner control influence women's employment decisions in Nigeria.First, control over mobility can restrict women's access to employment. Second, unequal domestic and care responsibilities can make employment difficult to sustain. Third, control over earnings can reduce the economic benefits of employment. Fourth, social sanctions can discourage women from entering particular occupations. Fifth, intimate-partner violence can directly disrupt employment. Sixth, patriarchal norms can create economic dependency.

Earlier Nigerian evidence demonstrated that women's employment and intimate-partner violence can be interconnected. Studies have found that the relationship between women's work and IPV varies according to prevailing local gender norms. In communities with greater approval of wife beating, the relationship between women's economic activity and physical IPV was stronger. This suggests that women's economic empowerment cannot be understood independently of the social environment in which employment occurs.

Recent Nigerian research also indicates that patriarchal influence extends beyond the household into workplaces. Jemba et al. (2024), studying 491 career widows employed in Nigerian organisations, found a significant relationship between patriarchal dominance and employment anxiety. The authors argue that patriarchal beliefs can contribute to perceptions of women as inferior in some work roles and can interact with gendered family-care expectations to constrain women's career opportunities. (Obi-Anike et al. 2026),

This suggests that women's employment decisions should not be understood solely as individual preferences. They are produced through interactions among household authority, cultural expectations, labour-market institutions and workplace practices. Patriarchal norms can therefore influence both the supply side of women's labour—whether women choose or are permitted to work—and the demand side, including the kinds of employment opportunities available to women.

The influence of patriarchy is not uniform across Nigeria. Gender norms interact with region, religion, ethnicity, education, marital status, household wealth and urban-rural residence. The World Bank's Nigeria Development Update indicates particularly large employment and

working-hours gaps between married men and women in northern Nigeria, while gender gaps are smaller but still significant in southern Nigeria.

Education and economic resources may weaken some patriarchal constraints by increasing women's bargaining power, access to information and employment alternatives. The 2024 NDHS shows that women's participation in reproductive and household decision-making generally increases with age, education and wealth. Nevertheless, education and employment do not automatically eliminate patriarchal control.

**The Relationship Between Women's Economic Empowerment and Vulnerability to Violence in Nigeria**

Women's economic empowerment and vulnerability to violence have a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship in Nigeria. Economic empowerment generally refers to women's ability to access and control income, productive assets, employment, financial services, markets and economic opportunities, as well as their capacity to participate in household and economic decision-making. In principle, greater economic autonomy should reduce women's dependence on intimate partners, strengthen their bargaining power and increase their capacity to leave abusive relationships. However, Nigerian evidence indicates that economic empowerment does not automatically protect women from violence. Its effect depends substantially on household power relations, patriarchal norms, men's attitudes, community acceptance of violence and women's actual control over the resources they generate (Dim 2026)

Economic empowerment becomes particularly relevant when it increases women's bargaining power within intimate relationships. Income alone may not be sufficient; what matters is whether women can control their income and participate meaningfully in decisions concerning household resources. The Nigerian context demonstrates this distinction clearly. A woman may be employed but still have limited control over her earnings, restricted mobility or little influence over major household decisions. Therefore, employment should not be treated as synonymous with empowerment. Economic empowerment is stronger when women possess independent income, control over resources, ownership of assets and meaningful household decision-making power. Recent evidence on IPV reinforces this argument (**Nduka, et al 2024).**

The IMF's analysis of economic empowerment and IPV found that the relationship between women's employment and violence

depends on women's household agency. Where women were not involved in household decision-making, employment was associated with a higher probability of IPV; where women participated in household decision-making, employment was associated with a lower probability of IPV. Although this particular analysis contains evidence from multiple countries rather than Nigeria alone, it provides an important framework for understanding why employment can have different effects depending on the distribution of household power.

A critical finding in the literature is that women's economic empowerment may, under certain circumstances, initially increase vulnerability to violence. This apparently paradoxical relationship can occur when women's growing economic independence challenges established patriarchal expectations about male authority and women's dependence.

In strongly patriarchal households, men may perceive women's increased income, employment or economic independence as a threat to their authority. Consequently, a woman who becomes financially independent may encounter increased monitoring, psychological abuse, economic control or physical violence. The IMF evidence demonstrates this interaction: the relationship between women's formal employment and IPV varies according to household decision-making, partner education and the degree to which IPV is socially accepted.

This finding is highly relevant to Nigeria, where traditional gender expectations continue to define men as household providers and women as caregivers. Economic empowerment programmes that increase women's earnings without simultaneously addressing gender norms may therefore produce mixed outcomes. In some households, women's economic success may improve cooperation and reduce dependency; in others, it may generate conflict where male partners perceive women's autonomy as a challenge to traditional authority. Economic abuse provides one of the clearest explanations for why women's economic activity does not necessarily protect them from violence. Economic abuse involves behaviours such as preventing a woman from working, controlling her earnings, taking her income, denying access to household resources, restricting access to bank accounts or preventing her from acquiring assets (Alabi 2022).

Evidence from Nigeria demonstrates that economic abuse is widespread. A study of 480 married Nigerian women reported a 64.2% prevalence of economic abuse, compared with 40.2% emotional abuse, 17.3% sexual abuse and

16.7% physical abuse. Economic abuse was also significantly associated with physical, emotional and sexual forms of IPV. This evidence suggests that economic empowerment must be distinguished from economic activity. A woman can work and generate income while simultaneously experiencing economic abuse. For example, a partner may permit employment but appropriate the woman's salary, restrict her business activities or determine how her earnings are spent. Consequently, policies that measure empowerment only through employment rates may overestimate women's actual economic autonomy (Nwabunike &Tenkorang (2025).,

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that crime against women in Nigeria is not only a serious human-rights, social and criminal-justice issue but also an important constraint on women's economic participation. The qualitative evidence indicates that intimate-partner violence, economic abuse, sexual harassment, coercive control and restrictions on mobility can affect women's decisions to enter employment, the type of work they undertake, their ability to remain employed and the benefits they derive from economic activities. Therefore, persistent or declining female labour-force participation should not be explained solely by education, skills, household income or employment opportunities; women's safety, autonomy and freedom from violence are equally important.

The relationship between violence and employment is complex and potentially bidirectional. Violence may restrict women's mobility, interfere with employment, control their earnings and increase economic dependence on partners. Economic dependence may subsequently make it more difficult for women to escape abusive relationships or seek assistance, creating a cycle of violence and economic vulnerability. Although employment can strengthen women's bargaining power and independence, it may also generate resistance where economic empowerment challenges established patriarchal expectations.

The findings are consistent with the Feminist Political Economy Perspective, which emphasises the influence of household power, unpaid reproductive labour, unequal resource distribution, occupational segregation and institutional discrimination on women's economic outcomes. From this perspective, violence can reinforce gender inequality by restricting women's autonomy and maintaining economic dependence.

The study therefore recommends an integrated gender-responsive policy approach.

Preventing violence, improving access to justice and support services, ensuring workplace safety, expanding childcare and social protection, increasing women's access to productive assets and challenging discriminatory gender norms should be addressed alongside employment creation. Ultimately, sustainable improvement in female labour-force participation requires an environment where women can work safely, control their earnings, make independent economic decisions and participate in economic activities without violence or coercion. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to further examine the causal pathways linking violence, economic empowerment and women's labour-force participation across Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

**1.Strengthen protection and legal enforcement:** The Nigerian government should strengthen the enforcement of laws against violence, sexual harassment, domestic abuse and other crimes against women. Law-enforcement agencies should provide accessible reporting mechanisms and ensure prompt investigation and prosecution of perpetrators to reduce impunity and improve women's sense of safety.

**2.Promote safe and inclusive employment environments:** Government and employers should implement policies that protect women from workplace harassment, discrimination and violence. 3.Safe transportation, flexible working arrangements, maternity protection and affordable childcare should also be promoted to reduce the barriers that prevent women from entering, remaining in or progressing within employment. **Expand economic empowerment and support services:** Government and relevant organisations should provide women, particularly survivors and economically vulnerable women, with access to skills training, affordable credit, entrepreneurship programmes, psychosocial support and legal assistance. Strengthening women's economic independence can reduce vulnerability to abuse and enhance their capacity to participate actively in the labour market.

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