

# DISPLACED AND VULNERABLE: THE HIDDEN REALITY OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN IN TIKO, CAMEROON

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**Abstract:** Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread in any environment characterized by conflict, and women and girls are the most affected. Cameroon's Anglophone crisis which is ongoing since 2016 has triggered the displacement of many people where women and children are more vulnerable to GBV. This research examines the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by internally displaced women (IDW) in Tiko Sub-Division and the existing response systems. Employing a concurrent triangulation design, the study collects and analyzes qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. An electronic survey collected data from 100 IDW, while qualitative data was collected from 20 IDW, community leaders, service providers through in-depth interviews, and 5 focus group discussions. The primary research questions are: (1) What are the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by IDW in Tiko Sub-Division? (2) What socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors contribute to GBV against IDW? (3) What actions do IDW take in response to these challenges, and what resources exist to assist them? Theoretical frameworks include feminist theory, focusing on the power relations and inequality, and the ecological model which considers individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. Highlighted results on IDW's experiences show disturbing levels of physical, emotional abuse, sexual violence, which armed groups and armed forces, family, and even community leaders often perpetrate. The study also finds the feminization of poverty phenomenon persisting among IDW in terms of their physical, psychological, social as well as economic conditions. This study is important in that it addresses the critical issue of GBV in Cameroon's conflict context (with Tiko acting as a host community to many IDPs), contributing to enhanced understanding of GBV dynamics, inform policy development, improve support services, empirical evidence for future research and promote the SDG 5 in Cameroon in achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

**Keyword:** Gender-based violence, internally displaced women, Cameroon context, displacement and migration, humanitarian crisis, violence against women

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## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) and its effects to the health and wellbeing of women and girls continue to be an issue of concern especially in the context of conflict and displacement. Women who have been displaced within the Tiko Sub-Division of Cameroon are examples this troubling situation as they navigate an unprotected socio-cultural environment that is mixed with systemic vulnerability. Abdullahi Dahie et al (2023) notes that the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) particularly increase in the context of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps as a result of heightened violence protective deficits, poverty, and the breakdown of community support systems.

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This tends to imply that even in the midst of humanitarian intervention, GBV is highly linked with societal norms customs that promote GBV and gender inequity.

Moreover, an issue of violence can be attributed to structures relating to GBV within the IDP context which requires multi-sector collaboration among governmental agencies, voluntary organizations, and transnational agencies. As for the UNHCR and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) affiliated relief agency, such adjustments have already been recommended. Other agencies have also noted the importance of violence protective measures that are more advanced for the displaced. Without addressing this issue, the cycle of violence against the already marginalized will continue unabated.

The ongoing Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, which started in 2016, has led to a massive displacement of individuals, with a particular emphasis on women and children. As in many conflict zones, internally displaced persons (IDPs) often face severe vulnerabilities, and among these, women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (GBV). GBV refers to harmful acts that are perpetrated against individuals based on their gender, and in conflict zones, women are often subjected to physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. This study focuses on internally displaced women (IDW) in Tiko Sub-Division, investigating the forms, incidence, impacts, and available support systems for GBV against these women.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continues to grow across the globe and has become an alarming societal problem. Women and girls, especially in the case of internal displacement, bear the brunt of the damages. For instance, in Tiko Sub-Division, Cameroon, displaced women and girls face additional vulnerabilities due to socio-cultural, militarization, and service deficit conditions. These conditions additionally increase the exposure of women to violence, abuse, and exploitation. Abdullahi Dahie et. al. (2023) and UNHCR (2021) assert these power imbalances and the weakening of social protective systems increase the likelihood of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in crisis situations.

Many studies report displaced women to be some of the most at risk to violence, and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) suggests one in three women globally will face sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime, with displaced populations at even greater risk. Ager et al. (2018) found that almost 50% of women residing in IDP camps in Northern Uganda reported some form of violence in a one-year period. Amnesty International (2019) also explains women in humanitarian situations face greater risks of rape, exploitation, and violence from intimate partners.

The UNFPA (2023) and Women in Alternative Action Cameroon (WAA Cameroon, 2022) reports demonstrate that there are still dangerous levels of GBV that are present in host communities and informal settlements. Displaced women and women in these populations have alarming amounts of GBV. In Cameroon, the problem is very dire in the conflict-stricken Northwest and Southwest Regions. Njie and Fomunung (2021) identify that woman escaping conflict in the Tiko, Buea, and Bamenda are surviving sexual harassment and people trying to trap them in transactional sexual relationships. Moreover, these women face domestic violence, social shaming, and bordering zero avenues to legal and psychosocial aid, which highlights and worsens the problem. These realities are indeed the same for women in other sub-Saharan countries, where the intersection of displacement and poverty (United Nations Women, 2020; and Akumu, 2020). There is a notable focus on the situation of internally displaced women in Tiko Sub-Division, particularly concerning violence in its

many forms—physical, psychological, and economic. How the intersection of gender with displacement functions enables violence, and limits the possibilities for reporting violence and accessing support services. In the long term, responses should focus on the structural barriers that underpin GBV, while also responsive to the needs of survivors to strengthen women’s agency and resilience. They must be for sustainable development that combines the protection and services with the strategic work to address the dominant structural violence to guarantee long-term change. For this purpose, the paper seeks to solve the following questions:

1. What are the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by IDW in Tiko Sub-Division?
2. What socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors contribute to GBV against IDW?
3. What coping mechanisms do IDW employ, and what support systems are available?

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

This study is guided by the following three specific objectives:

- To assess the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced by IDW in Tiko Sub-Division.
- To identify socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors contributing to GBV.
- To examine the coping mechanisms of IDW and evaluate existing support structures.

## **2. Literature Review**

Violence pertaining to a particular gender in times of conflict has been reported many times. Researchers argue that social dislocation, economic collapse, and unsatisfactory social services increase the risk of GBV towards women in displacement. Displaced women are at heightened risk of rape, violence, and exploitation, especially in cases where separation from family or dependency on strangers' aid presents itself (Amnesty International, 2019). Furthermore, conflict induced poverty among women economically marginalized women makes them more prone to being abused and creates greater challenges for them to get out of abusive situations (United Nations Women, 2020). Cameroon, like other states in the continent of Africa, is facing increasing GBV for women in the Anglophone regions, where violence has been a product of conflicts in the place.

### **2.1 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

The IASC (2025) summarizes Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as “violence which is perpetrated against an individual on the grounds of their gender or sex.” It is also defined as the act of inflicting physical, sexual and/or psychological harm on an individual, irrespective of the locus of violence. The issue of Gender-based violence is a sensitive issue the world over. It becomes even more pronounced during times of war and conflict, and more than any other, the burden is increasingly carried by women, girls and the internally displaced. For instance, Ager et al (world) carried out a study in Northern Uganda and found out that in the past year, nearly 50% of the women dwelling in IDP camps reported having experienced violence. Violence against the women includes, abuse and exploitation, which is not only a violation of their rights but is also a threat to their health and

wellbeing. Among the consequences is the raising issue of unwanted pregnancies as a result of out of wedlock sexual encounters, and in most cases, the women in question lack the basic and necessary funds to access humanitarian assistance, which in turn has numerous strategic and humanitarian consequences that must be taken to address.

The COVID-19 pandemic along with ongoing violent conflicts has made the situation in Somalia more severe, particularly for women and girls living in IDP camps who have reported shocking levels of violence. This is likely to get worst as people become more displaced related to the crisis. Abdullahi Dahie et al., (2023) reports that one out of three women worldwide will face either sexual or physical violence at least once in their life. For Internally displaced women, the chances are even higher. Economically motivated social issues, addiction, and a lack of social infrastructure are some of the many reasons that make these women more vulnerable to abuse. It is vital to tackle enforceable prevention strategies if the negative impact GBV on women is to be minimized.

In Cameroon's specific scenario, there is evidence showing the increase in GBV in the North West and South West Regions affected by the Anglophone crisis. Njie and Fomunung (2021) state that internally displaced women in the Northwest and Southwest regions face daily threats of sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and economic abuse, especially in host communities and informal settlements. Similarly, the 2022 study by Women in Alternative Action Cameroon (WAA Cameroon) demonstrates that women fleeing conflict in Tiko, Buea, and Bamenda face rampant transactional sex, coercion, and domestic violence with little to no support services available.

On the other hand, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Cameroon (2023) documents an increase of GBV cases reported within IDP camps and surrounding host communities. These cases are in critical need of legal aid and psychosocial support, which many remain denied. The report underscores that displacement status, combined with cultural stigma and limited law enforcement, contributes significantly to underreporting and perpetuation of abuse.

Although the number of research regarding GBV in Cameroon has increased, most of the available academic literature continues to be descriptive in nature, emphasizing the prevalence and forms of abuse and the services available (Nzokang & Fomunung, 2021; UNFPA, 2023; WAA Cameroon, 2022). Though these works contribute to GBV scholarship, they do not adequately analyze the realities that survivors face and how, in particular, displaced women cope with and resist violence in displacement contexts. Also, there is a striking lack of community based, survivor focused research where the displaced women narrate the stories themselves.

Furthermore, the literature has insufficient scholarship on women's agency, socio-cultural contexts that shape coping mechanisms, and the psychosocial sequel of GBV in prolonged emergencies. Consequently, the humanitarian and policy approaches are often devoid of contextual nuance that informs the design of intervention programs that are relevant and appropriately tailored to the situation. The study 'Resisting in Silence: Coping with GBV among IDPs in Cameroon' attempts to address those gaps, looking beyond the mere numbers, the shift in focus to the IDPs women in Cameroon attempts to understand the coping and resistance mechanisms of the survivors and the adaptations made to their lives in the face of overwhelming absence of institutional support.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Theories of the Feminist school of thought and the Ecological Model both provide critical context to analyze the phenomenon of gender-based violence within the framework of the displacement context of the Tiko Sub-Division, Cameroon

Feminist Theory attributes the phenomenon of GBV to the overarching systems of patriarchy, gender systemic inequality, and socio-political marginalization. It shows how the denial of women's economic opportunities and the exclusion of women from the decision making process profoundly and deeply subordinate women and social conditions where violence against women is normalized. For Women who are displaced in Tiko, the conditions of economic marginalization, resource scarcity and chronic exposure to violence, which are the structural unequal power relations, are the primary reasons for violence against women.

Unlike the Ecological Model which focuses on the violence against women from the individual, relational, community, and systemic levels, Heise (1998) strengthens it by articulating and situating GBV within interrelated multi-dimensional levels of influence and systems. At the individual level, the violence against women has its own unique factors. Trauma and displacement construct individual vulnerability to abuse. At the relational level, violence against women is exacerbated by a dysfunctional intimate or family network. At the community level, the GBV is enabled by militarization, the social and economic aspects of displacement, and the distress. At the systemic level, weak legal boundaries, coupled with strict gender roles on all levels of social and structural violence, promote gender-based violence.

The Feminist theory and the Ecological Model complement each in the sense that while the former describes systemic and ideological frameworks of GBV, the latter shows how inequalities are reproduced and sustained from the individual to the societal levels.

The integration of these two theories provides a more comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence (GBV). From a Feminist Theory perspective, GBV is an outcome of systemic ideologies and structures, while the Ecological Model explains how macro level inequities are reproduced and sustained at various social strata. For instance, theories around the economic marginalization of women speak to the ecological model's community and societal levels, showing how GBV is sustained through structural deprivation and poor governance. These two theories together provide a thorough analysis of the cause and the complex inter relations of GBV in the context of displacement in Tiko.

### **3. Methodology**

This research made use of the mixed methods altogether in order to understand the phenomena of GBV among IDWs and it combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection was done using surveys and in-depth interviews and FGDs in such a way that the results could be validated and analyzed thoroughly. It was possible to use the concurrent triangulation design to gather and analyze simultaneously statistical data and case studies.

In terms of analyzing GBV among IDWs, a multi-method approach was employed. One hundred (100) IDWs completed structured questionnaires that attempted to quantify the incidence, nature, and consequences of GBV. In order to facilitate statistical analysis and uniformity, the surveys used closed-ended questions. Apart from the survey, twenty (20) participants who included survivors, community leaders, and service providers were included in the in-depth interviews. Particularly the purpose of these interviews was to get from the respondents their GBV experiences, views, and knowledge regarding the social and institutional support available to survivors. The statistical data obtained from the survey was interpreted using qualitative data obtained from these interviews.

Additionally, we organized five focus group discussions at Moquo, Tiko Town, Mutengene, Misselle, and Likomba in Tiko Sub-Division. Each group comprised seven women, all of whom were survivors of gender-based violence. The focus group discussions provided an opportunity for survivors to feel safe enough to speak about their experiences, how they coped, and the problems they encountered in getting help. This also encouraged peer support and validation for the participants.

To ensure diversity regarding age, marital status, and social and economic background, purposive sampling was used. This technique helped the study focus on participants who had experienced gender-based violence and could share crucial insights. Also, survivors who were too ashamed and traumatized to come forward were identified through snowball sampling. With the help of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) staff, community members, and other survivors, the study was designed to locate and engage people who would otherwise remain silent.

To address the sensitivity of the subject matter surrounding gender-based violence and international development, a specific technique was used to collect the data. The participants of the study were asked survey questions to eliminate issues around illiteracy. To assist respondents in answering questions, enumerators were given explanations as guides.

In addition, accessible interview times and locations were provided to help participants express themselves without any fear of being judged, as outlined in the proposal. Interviewers maintained an objective, empathic, and neutral position, as were the researchers in the study. The FGDs were positively oriented and constructed in a way that enabled the participants to provide affirmation and assistance to their fellow survivors as they recounted their narratives. The open forum facilitated participants to share their individual narratives with the group and, in the process, engage in collective, synergistic healing, the exchange of coping strategies, and the psychosocial support of one another. There was an understanding of the subject matter so that the participants were able to express themselves.

In this research, quantitative descriptive statistics and thematic approaches to qualitative data were used. For descriptive statistics generated from the surveys, an analysis was done with respect to the patterns, trends and numbers of participants who experienced GBV to see if and how deeply and widely the cases were distributed within the population. For the interviews and FGDs, participants' accounts, challenges, and coping strategies that survivors offered and the support systems to most of the survivors were analyzed. This strongly articulated the lived realities of participants, thus documenting their realities.

In this research, participants were asked to provide informed consent and this was a way of ensuring ethical research practices were upheld. The identities of the participants were kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms, and the data was coded. In addition, participants were made aware that they were free to choose whether or not to take part in the study and that they had the right to withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions. There was no way participants would be treated poorly, and the study was transparent about this when providing information about the refusal to take part. Privacy and confidentiality would be assured for the duration of the research.

#### **4. Results**

During the assessment, the extent of gender-based violence (GBV) in the Tiko Sub-Division was observed with great concern. Below, a table encapsulates the key socio-cultural, economic, environmental, and other coping and support factors that explain the prevalence and forms of GBV.

##### **4.1 Quantitative Findings of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Among Internally Displaced Women (IDW) in Tiko Sub-Division**

*Table 1: Prevalence and Forms of GBV Experienced by IDW in Tiko Sub-Division*

Type of GBV	Percentage of IDW Reporting Experience (%)	Most Common Perpetrators	Forms of Violence Reported
Physical Violence	48%	Armed groups (30%), Family members (18%)	Beating, kicking, physical assault, attempted strangulation
Sexual Violence	34%	Armed groups (25%), Community leaders (9%)	Rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution
Emotional Abuse	40%	Spouses (30%), Family members (10%)	Verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, emotional manipulation
Economic Exploitation	58%	Employers (20%), Family members (38%)	Unpaid or underpaid labor, taking control of wages, forced dependence

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024**

Table 1 show that economic exploitation stands as the most prevalent form of Gender Based Violence (GBV) experienced by IDW at 58%. Other forms of violence which follow in lesser proportions are physical violence at 48%, emotional abuse at 40%, and sexual violence at 34%. It should be noted that psychological abuse is very harmful though subtle because it destroys survivors' confidence and

isolates them, making it hard to leave abusive partners (Evans et al., 2014). The most common type of perpetrators of GBV were either armed groups or family members which shows that IDW are vulnerable in both conflict and displacement environments. Physical violence is also inflicted by armed groups and family members at 30% and 18% respectively. This is coupled with the insecurity and instability caused as armed groups attack people at random and, within families, as there may be control in situations of displacement. In addition, sexual violence is largely committed by armed groups and community leaders at 25% and 9% respectively, showing that both external and internal power structures promote sexual abuse. Thus, armed groups are the highest perpetrators of both physical and sexual violence. Furthermore, economic exploitation perpetrated by family members is also common at 38%, aid in showing how economic vulnerability and patriarchal relations foster abuse. The result from this study when compared to similar studies in other Cameroon areas such as the North West region of Cameroon, the rates of economic exploitation and emotional abuse in Tiko are notably higher. For instance, research conducted by Alio et al. (2011) in Bamenda found emotional abuse rates at 30.7%, while in Tiko, it reached 38%.

In summary GBV in Tiko Sub-Division is multi-dimensional and affects women in physical, emotional, and economic ways. The heightened levels of economic oppression and bodily harm imply that women's displacement has worsened their risk to violence. Therefore, there is a need for customized responses that attend to not just physical acts of violence, but also the economic and psychological violence decimated in wars.

*Table 2: Socio-Cultural, Economic, and Environmental Factors Contributing to GBV Against IDW*

Factor	Percentage of Respondents Identifying This Factor as Contributing to GBV (%)	Impact on GBV
Cultural Norms (Patriarchy)	72%	Reinforces male dominance, justifies violence in households, limits women's agency
Economic Vulnerability (Poverty)	85%	Economic dependence on abusers, forced labor, lack of financial independence
Displacement and Loss of Support	78%	Breakdown of family structures, isolation, and lack of protective networks
Lack of Education	60%	Limited awareness of rights, inability to seek help, fear of stigma and retribution
Lack of Legal Protection	68%	Perpetrators are not held accountable; women face barriers to reporting violence

Source Fieldwork 2024

Data from Table 2 shows the following; cultural norms, particularly those related to patriarchy, are a significant contributor to GBV, as 72% of respondents identified them as playing a role in justifying and perpetuating violence within families; economic vulnerability, with 85% of respondents pointing to it as a contributing factor, highlights how displacement leaves women economically dependent on others, which increases their susceptibility to exploitation and violence; the displacement and loss of

support (78%) also exacerbates the situation by severing social networks that might otherwise offer protection and assistance; and the lack of education (60%) and legal protection (68%) further compound the vulnerability of IDW by preventing them from recognizing their rights and accessing resources to report violence. Mkafu Policy Institute (2014) in analyzing the GBV situation in Cameroon revealed that low access to resource and control over them, as well as economic dependence on men are factors that promote violence and exploitation against women.

This infers that the displacement crisis in Tiko Sub-Division has deepened the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to GBV. Efforts to combat GBV should focus on addressing the root causes, such as economic empowerment, changing harmful cultural norms, increasing access to education, and strengthening legal protection for women. Therefore, community-based interventions that engage men and boys in the process of changing patriarchal attitudes are crucial to reducing GBV.

*Table 3: Coping Mechanisms Employed by IDW and Available Support Systems*

Coping Mechanism	Percentage of IDW Using This Mechanism (%)	Sources of Support	Availability of Support
Seeking Shelter with Family/Relatives	35%	Family members, community members	Limited due to overcrowded displacement camps, lack of resources
Seeking Medical Help	20%	NGOs, healthcare providers	Inconsistent access to healthcare, limited medical facilities
Engaging in Small Business	25%	Self-employed, community support	Limited due to lack of capital, insecure environment
Seeking Help from NGOs	15%	NGOs, local organizations	NGOs overwhelmed by demand, lack of specialized services
Isolation or Withdrawal	18%	Self, local community	None, leading to further mental and emotional strain

Findings from Table 3 demonstrate the following: that seeking shelter with family or relatives is the most common coping mechanism (35%), though overcrowded displacement camps and strained family resources limit the effectiveness of this option. This result aligns with report by UNHCR (2020) who noted that internally displaced women usually turn to family and relatives as a means to

cope with trauma associated with GBV and instability. Also, seeking medical help (20%) and seeking help from NGOs (15%) are options that IDW rely on, but the inconsistent access to healthcare and overwhelmed NGO services show the inadequate availability of these support systems. In addition, engaging in small businesses (25%) is another important coping strategy, though it is hindered by the lack of financial resources and an unstable environment, and isolation or withdrawal (18%) is a less active coping mechanism but indicates that some women resort to self-imposed isolation as a way to avoid further harm or humiliation, though this often worsens their psychological well-being.

This therefore indicate is a clear gap in available support services for IDW in Tiko Sub-Division, with many women relying on informal or self-managed coping mechanisms due to a lack of formal support systems. As such, state and non-state actors play a vital role in offering healthcare, shelter, and economic assistance, but there is a growing disparity between demand and capacity. Hence, the need to equip women with legal, medical, and psychological resources expands support systems.

#### **4.2 Findings through Case Narratives and Analysis**

The data in Table 1 shows the different types of GBV that internally displaced women (IDW) experience in Tiko Sub-Division. To help explain the numbers better, this section shares real stories from some of the women who took part in the study.

**Marie**, a 32-year-old woman, was forced to leave her village after her house was burned during a violent raid. She said she was raped many times by armed men. Later, her own uncle took the little money she had saved. Marie was traumatized, but a local NGO helped her. They gave her counseling and legal help, and also gave her a small grant to start a business. This gave her back some hope and independence.

**Alice**, a 40-year-old mother of three, lives in Camp 7 in Tiko. She said her husband left her after they were displaced. Her relatives often insulted her and blamed her for the family's problems. Alice felt very sad and alone. But she found some comfort in a support group where women share their stories and encourage one another.

**Esther**, 28, is from Bafut in the North West Region of Cameroon. She ran to Tiko after her village was attacked by armed groups. During her escape, she was caught by the armed men and was beat and raped right in front of her children. This experience resulted in a severe form of depression. She became a burden to her family. Esther's story illustrates how GBV inflicts bodily harm as well as deep emotional distress, especially when such violence takes place in front of children. Survivors such as Esther require more than just physical treatment; she need comprehensive and sustained psychological therapy.

**Mabel**, aged 35, escaped from her house and now resides with her boss in Tiko. She was abandoned by her husband and is now mother to three kids. Currently, Mabel is employed as a house help and does all the work in the house including running other errands for her boss and his wife. However, her boss deducted almost all her salary claiming it was for food and accommodations he is giving to Mabel and her children. Mabel exerts a lot of effort but her family's demands cannot be satisfied. Her story highlights the plight of many women who, after being displaced, are driven to accept intolerable forms of employment.

**Lucy**, 40, came to Tiko after escaping an attack in her village. Her husband abandoned her and their five children. Lucy disclosed that her own family members ridiculed her and devalued her in every sense of the word. There were times when she cried, as well as times when she could neither eat nor sleep, alongside experiencing anxiety. Lucy's case demonstrates how psychological abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse. Counseling as well as support groups would aid in restoring the self-esteem Lucy and women like her have lost.

**Susan**, a project coordinator from a local NGO, shared what she sees every day. "Many displaced women in the camps are completely isolated," she said. "They don't have access to healthcare, education, or support. Some are forced to depend on the same people who abuse them." Susan said many women come to the NGO for help, but the team is overwhelmed. There are not enough shelters, lawyers, or counselors. Her words show how the needs of GBV survivors are bigger than what current services can handle. NGOs are trying, but they need more support and resources.

**George**, a community leader in Tiko, talked about how traditions can make GBV worse. "Some people still think it's okay for a man to control his wife's money or beat her," he said. He admitted that while some people are learning about GBV, old beliefs are still strong. Changing these beliefs will take time. George's comments indicate that culture can assist or hinder attempts to curb GBV. This is especially relevant when considering the harmful community traditions.

IDW in Tiko Sub-Division are facing GBV issues deeply entrenched among the population. Survivors endure a multitude of challenges ranging from violence, poverty, social shame, lack of assistance, and harmful cultural norms. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach including, but not limited to, health care, legal assistance, counseling, and comprehensive community education. We must prioritize the needs of the survivors and work alongside community leaders to transform deeply ingrained concepts of gender and violence. All communities must make concrete commitment to put an end to GBV.

## **5. Limitations of the Study**

This study has some limitations. First of all, primary data was gathered from 100 internally displaced women (IDW) through structured questionnaires, as well as the interviews conducted with 20 key informants. Consequently, the use of closed-ended questions meant that the respondents' lived experiences could not be completely documented. Second, since the sample size was small and being objectively selected, it resulted in the sample data being non-representative, thereby affecting the conclusions that could be drawn. Third, gaining access to the study participants was in itself a challenge due to the sensitive issue of GBV, the stigma surrounding it, and the unremitting violence in the region. These elements limited the researcher's coverage of the region and mobility. Other factors such as culture, language, recall, and social desirability could also have limited the accuracy of the responses provided. The findings may have been affected by time and financial constraints which limited engagement and exploration in coping mechanisms and support systems.

## **6. Key Policy Recommendations**

### **6.1 Legal Frameworks Strengthening by the Cameroon Government**

Even though there are laws pertaining to gender-based violence camouflaged in the law books of Cameroon, their application and scope are severely lacking, particularly in war zones. Reforms in the legal framework by the government of Cameroon may require stiffening the punishment for GBV offenders, ensuring greater safeguarding for women during legal actions, and making the legal framework more user-friendly for displaced women. Also aid for legal proceedings should be made available to IDWs, especially in displacement settings or rural areas. Displaced women can be provided legal assistance through the constitution of mobile aid clinics or by contracting local non-governmental organizations which will eliminate the security and financial constraints intimidation barrier. Legal reforms by the state should aim at instituting safe, secure, and confidential windows for reporting abuses at the community level with personnel including the local politicians, police officers, and reliable NGOs.

Enforcement officers and judicial authorities responsible for issuance of statutory instruments should have adequate training on GBV especially in the delicate circumstances of GBV in displacement which will enable them to treat women's issues respectfully, and take their cases seriously while ensuring that the perpetrators are punished.

### **6.2 Enhancing Resource Accessibility by State and Non-state Actors**

In Tiko Sub-Division, state and non-state actors should construct or increase the capacity of shelters for displaced women suffering from GBV. They should create safe spaces, medical, mental health, and disability services specialized for single mothers, pregnant women, and women with disabilities. The addition of healthcare services and trauma-informed counseling services will assist survivors in recovering and rebuilding their lives.

### **6.3 Community Mobilization**

Local Leaders, NGOs, and Government entities should focus on engaging traditional, religious, and elder leaders in community mobilization as they can increase the impact of GBV awareness/educational campaigns. Such public figures should be engaged to attend and design as a part the program that would tackle the existing negative structural violence. Town hall meetings, media programs, and civic education activities focusing on gender balance as well as positive masculinity and the need to empower women to actively participate in community leadership should be conducted. Fighting GBV will be enhanced by engaging men and boys to non-violent discussions that will shift social norms and attitudes towards GBV.

### **6.4 Social and Economic Empowerment for GBV Survivors**

Government bodies and local partners NGOs, community groups, banks, women's advocates, and schools must make the social and economic life of GBV survivors, especially displaced women in Tiko Sub-Division, a top concern. Empowerment is more than care and shelter; it opens a path to healing, self-reliance, and lasting strength. Displaced women who suffer GBV often stay with their abusers because they depend on them for money and have no safe options. When survivors lack income, savings, or a supportive network, walking away feels impossible. That is why it important to

build an income stream that should be owned and controlled by the women, for this is crucial in breaking the cycle of violence. In order to achieve this goal, it necessary for state and non-state partners to join forces and build community savings groups, women-only markets, and livelihood plans which are grounded on survivors own stories, thus enabling the women have shared trust and ownership of the project. It important for such settings to be safe, trauma-aware, and must be led by women themselves at every step of the process. In addition to these measures, GBV response must be included in financial literacy classes, trade skills workshops, and access to micro-loans or start-up cash projects.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research made an in-depth understanding of the hidden reality of GBV experienced by internally displaced women in Tiko Sub-Division, Cameroon. This research therefore advocates for the development of policies, community mobilization, as well as an all-inclusive support system address the issue of GBV. With the use of the feminist theory and the ecological model, the study constructs and analyzes GBV against internally displaced women and explains the reasoning behind it.

The study further sheds light on the hidden aspects of GBV against IDW in the Tiko Sub-Division of Cameroon by defining its scope, forms, and causative factors as an infringement of human rights. The findings from the study highlight not only the need for developing new policies but also the need to respond adequately to the needs of IDW.

Although the study sheds light on the realities of GBV among IDW in conflict context of Tiko Sub-Division Cameroon, considerable scope for further investigation still remains. The study proposes that additional research can be carried out to study the impact of GBV and displacement on women's well-being through longitudinal studies. Another study can be done to evaluate the impact of intervention programs, as well as regional comparative analyses with other areas affected by conflict like Bamenda, Buea and Limbe. This would greatly help in tailoring solutions to the specific needs of internally displaced women. Finally, the problem of GBV can be targeted in a more effective manner by addressing the negative gender biases and stigmas and ensuring that men participate actively as allies and community leaders GBV intervention programs.

When GBV is addressed compassionately yet tactfully, the internally displaced women of the Tiko Sub-Division Cameroon will regain their human rights which have been wrenched violently from them. Thus, realistic systemic transformation is urgently required here because these women need to be protected and empowered in the environment which permits such violence to occur.

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### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors claim no conflict of interest in relation to this publication. This declaration is made to maintain the appropriate bounds of the integrity of research. We understand and appreciate the possibilities of conflicts of interest, which may include and are not limited to, financial, personal and professional ties which may alter the outcome of the research in some way.

In compliance with ethical requirements, we confirm that this study was done independently and that the results and conclusions are based on data collected and analyzed. We maintain that any trust in the scientific community relies heavily on the declaration of possible conflicts, or lack thereof, and on the need for the work to contribute positively to the body of knowledge.

We have committed best practices in research ethics and understand that there needs to be reasonable justification for lack of controversy surrounding the scholarly work.