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## Victim blaming and cultural narratives in rural Nigeria: A study using Longwe's women empowerment framework

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### ABSTRACT

*In rural Nigerian communities, cultural narratives often shape perceptions of gender roles, morality and justice. This contributes to victim-blaming attitudes toward women who experience violence. This paper explores how such narratives impact access to support services and the overall empowerment of female survivors. Drawing on Longwe's Women Empowerment Framework, the analysis examines five dimensions of gender equality – welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control – to assess whether current service delivery models empower women or reinforce existing inequalities. Through a critical review of selected case studies and policy responses in Nigerian rural settings, this paper highlights systemic gaps in service provision and proposes culturally responsive interventions that promote agency, awareness and decision-making power for women. Through the application of an African-centered feminist lens, the study advocates for transformative approaches that challenge victim-blaming cultures and strengthen women's rights within community-based frameworks in Nigeria.*

**KEY TERMS:** cultural norms, empowerment, gender-based violence, victim blaming, women.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence is a major global problem. It affects roughly one-third of women worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO] 2022). In Nigeria, the prevalence is alarmingly high. surveys suggest around 33% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual abuse (Ochojila, 2024). These abuses take place in all settings, but cultural attitudes in rural communities often worsen the problem. In many Nigerian villages, traditional norms and beliefs stigmatize victims and excuse perpetrators. For example, survivors of rape or assault are sometimes blamed for dressing indecently or being careless (Nwusulor & Onwubiko, 2021). Such victim-blaming discourages women from reporting violence or seeking help. Nwusulor and Onwubiko (2021) noted that after enduring sexual abuse, only 5.0% of young women even sought help and a mere 3.5% received support. This means most victims suffer in silence.

Rural Nigeria adds layers of complexity. Many communities emphasize family honour and traditional hierarchy over individual rights (Silva et al., 2024). Women's fears of stigma and retaliation are often confirmed by neighbors and sometimes even family members. A recent report notes that cultural beliefs in Nigeria often perpetuate victim-blaming mentalities and discourage survivors from coming forward (Ochojila, 2024). These attitudes create powerful disincentives for a woman to report abuse. She may face scorn or pressure to remain quiet, rather than receive support. In effect, the cultural narrative in many rural areas treats women as responsible for their own victimization (Igbolekwu et al., 2021).

These deep-rooted attitudes are not just private opinions – they are embedded in institutions, religious teachings and social expectations (Ezeaka & Bartholomew, 2025). In many rural areas in Nigeria, Ajayi et al. (2021) noted that traditional leaders, family elders, and even service providers may reinforce beliefs that justify or normalize violence against women. This normalization reduces the urgency of intervention and limits the ability of survivors to demand justice or healing. When cultural beliefs are so influential, it becomes clear that addressing violence is not just about creating laws or building shelters. It requires a broader shift in how communities understand gender, power and responsibility. To properly evaluate what empowers women in such settings, we need a framework that goes beyond basic welfare and considers the deeper layers of awareness, participation and control.

This paper examines how such victim-blaming narratives hinder women's empowerment in rural Nigeria. We used Sara H. Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (1995) as a lens. Longwe's model has five dimensions – welfare, access, conscientization, participation, and control – which mark increasing levels of gender equality. Organizing our analysis around these dimensions enabled us to assess whether current services and norms empower rural survivors or simply reinforce existing inequalities. Our focus is on how cultural beliefs shape each of these areas for women who have experienced violence. We also adopt an African-centered feminist perspective, which recognizes the importance of local context and collective solutions. This approach centers African women lived realities, challenges Western-centric feminist assumptions and emphasizes culturally rooted, as well as community-based strategies for empowerment. This perspective values indigenous knowledge systems and the dismantling of both patriarchal and colonial power structures that shape gender-based violence in African contexts.

The paper begins with a brief overview of Longwe's framework and its relevance. We then describe our qualitative methodology, which draws on published studies, reports, and case examples from rural Nigeria. Next, we discuss five substantive issues – one for each empowerment dimension. This illustrates how victim-blaming and cultural narratives affect women's welfare, access to resources, consciousness, participation and control. The conclusion summarizes the key findings. Finally, we offer recommendations for culturally responsive interventions. These suggestions aim to shift harmful narratives and strengthen women's agency, awareness and decision-making power in their communities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Sara H. Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework (WEF). Longwe, a gender advocate, developed the WEF in 1995 to analyze gender equality in development programmes. Longwe's model is explicitly political. It views women's poverty as the result of systemic oppression and exploitation, not individual shortcomings. The goal is to move from mere gender equity toward full gender equality. In Longwe's view, empowerment means that women share equally with men in decision-making and control over resources. Longwe's framework defines five progressive levels of equality, each representing a deeper degree of women's empowerment (Ola & Aladekomo, 2013). According to Longwe (1995) framework, the lowest level is Welfare, which concerns women's basic needs (health, food, shelter). The next level is Access; meaning women have access to income, education, land and other resources. Conscientization (sometimes called *awareness-raising*) is the third level, and it refers to critical understanding: recognizing the causes of gender inequality and changing attitudes accordingly. The fourth level is Participation, which means women take active roles in decision-making at household, community and national levels. The highest level is Control; women have equal control with men

over factors of production and societal decisions. In practice, Longwe saw empowerment as cumulative and advancing through each level builds greater equality.

In our study, Longwe's framework provides a structure to evaluate whether rural Nigerian women who experience violence achieve genuine empowerment or remain disempowered. For each level, we will examine how cultural narratives and current services either help women move up the hierarchy or keep them down. This framework fits the study because it clearly links empowerment to systemic issues of power and control, which are deeply influenced by local norms (Pratto, 2016). Through the application of an African-centered lens, we also emphasize that empowerment must respect cultural context. Longwe's framework helps us to ask: do support interventions simply meet women's immediate needs (welfare), or do they ultimately promote awareness, participation, and control?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Study design*

This study employed an integrative qualitative literature review design, which allowed us to synthesize empirical studies, policy documents, case reports and theoretical texts on victim-blaming and women's empowerment in rural Nigeria. An integrative review was chosen because it accommodates diverse sources and methodologies while enabling a critical and interpretive analysis of themes across literature (Ilo et al., 2025; Ajah et al., 2025). This approach is particularly appropriate where the goal is to examine complex socio-cultural dynamics rather than measure variables quantitatively.

This is a qualitative, theory-driven study using secondary data. Although we did not collect new empirical data through interviews or fieldwork, our methodology is qualitative in nature because it centers on the interpretive analysis of narrative, discursive and experiential content within existing texts (Osadebe et al., 2024; Obasi et al., 2024). Our approach is essentially a desk analysis of existing literature and reports – a form of critical narrative literature review. By “critical,” we mean that our analysis does not merely summarize findings but interrogates underlying power dynamics, cultural ideologies, and institutional practices that sustain victim-blaming and disempowerment. We surveyed recent academic studies, NGO and government reports, media articles, and case studies that address violence against women in Nigeria, with a focus on rural settings. Key sources included peer-reviewed journals, organizational publications (e.g., UNICEF, UN Women), and well-documented examples of rural interventions. We did not collect new empirical data; instead, we synthesized evidence from these sources to understand patterns and narratives. The design was exploration and descriptive.

### **Data sources and search strategy**

We selected studies from roughly 2018 onward to capture current conditions, while also including some classic theoretical works for context. These “classic” works were identified based on their foundational influence in gender studies, African feminism, or development literature. Particularly texts that introduced or significantly shaped core concepts such as women's empowerment (e.g., Longwe, 1995), cultural patriarchy, or victim-blaming theory. Inclusion was determined by citation frequency in peer-reviewed literature, relevance to our analytical framework and conceptual utility in interpreting contemporary rural Nigerian contexts.

To map the complex interplay between cultural narratives, victim-blaming, and women's empowerment in rural Nigeria, we designed a deliberate, multi-phase search strategy. Between January and March 2024, the authors conducted systematic searches across major academic databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and African Journals Online [AJOL]), as well as gray literature repositories. Our keyword combinations were purposefully crafted to balance breadth and precision. Phrases like “victim blaming AND Nigeria AND rural,” “gender norms AND GBV AND cultural beliefs,” and “women's empowerment AND Longwe framework AND Nigeria” helped us surface literature that spoke directly to our core themes.

Recognizing that algorithm-driven searches can miss pivotal works, we supplemented our digital efforts with manual backward citation tracing. We combed through the reference lists of seminal articles and reports to uncover additional relevant sources. Initial screening was carried out independently by two authors, who evaluated titles and abstracts against three core criteria: (1) a clear focus on rural Nigerian communities; (2) substantive discussion of gender-based violence or victim-blaming dynamics; and (3) relevance to at least one dimension of Longwe's empowerment framework. Where disagreements arose, we resolved them through collaboration. We then moved to full-text evaluation, prioritizing sources that offered rich, qualitative insights. Special attention was given to works that centered on women lived experiences or documented grassroots responses to violence, in keeping with our African-centered feminist orientation. Methodological rigor and cultural specificity were key considerations throughout.

### **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The inclusion strategy includes: Studies focused on gender-based violence, victim-blaming, or women's empowerment in Nigeria, with emphasis on rural contexts; Publications between 2018 and 2024 to capture contemporary cultural and policy developments; Peer-reviewed journal articles, NGO reports, policy documents, newspaper investigations, and doctoral theses containing substantive qualitative insights; Sources discussing at least one of Longwe's empowerment dimensions. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria includes Studies focusing exclusively on non-Nigerian contexts; Articles centred solely on urban populations with no rural component; Sources lacking clear methodological grounding or insufficient discussion relevant to victim-blaming or empowerment; and Duplicate sources identified through cross-database searching.

The search initially yielded 146 records across all databases. After removing duplicates ( $n = 32$ ), 114 titles and abstracts were screened. A total of 56 articles did not meet the inclusion criteria (mostly due to being urban-focused or irrelevant to victim-blaming). Fifty-eight (58) full-text sources were assessed in detail. Of these, 29 sources were excluded due to insufficient methodological clarity or lack of relevance to Longwe's framework. Twenty-nine (29) sources met all criteria and were included in the final thematic synthesis.

### Data analysis

For data analysis, we used thematic content analysis organized within Longwe's empowerment dimensions. We read each source and noted issues related to welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control. We then looked for recurring cultural narratives such as beliefs about female virtue or family honour and their impacts. This allowed us to map specific cultural factors (like bride-price, patriarchal authority, stigma) onto each empowerment level. For example, in analyzing welfare, we looked at how stigma (a narrative) affects survivors' access to healthcare. This process was similar to the method used by Ezeaka and Bartholomew (2025), who analyzed communication strategies by reviewing literature and case studies. Throughout, we maintained an African-centered feminist lens by paying attention to local voices and community dynamics. We critically assessed whether interventions respected women's agencies or simply imposed outside solutions.

To enhance credibility and analytical rigor, two authors independently screened sources and extracted thematic data (Chinweze et al., 2024; Onyejegbu et al., 2024). Disagreements were resolved through discussion. The use of multiple databases, backwards citation tracing, and cross-checking with theoretical frameworks strengthened the reliability of the final synthesis. Themes were constantly compared against Longwe's empowerment dimensions to ensure conceptual consistency and depth.

## RESULTS (SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES)

This section discusses five key issues, corresponding to Longwe's five empowerment dimensions. In each, we examine how victim-blaming narratives and cultural norms in rural Nigeria affect women's situation. We also note how existing support services interact with these factors.

### Welfare

The welfare dimension concerns women's basic well-being after experiencing violence. This includes physical care (medical and psychological support) and safety. In rural Nigeria, however, cultural narratives often undermine women's welfare needs. Victim-blaming can lead to neglect or even punishment of survivors. For instance, Nwusulor and Onwubiko (2021) found that victims of sexual violence in Nigeria are sometimes explicitly blamed for their own abuse (for "indecent dressing" or "being careless"). Such responses reduce sympathy and support for survivors. In that study, only 3.5% of abused young women received any help or counseling after assault. Many more did not seek help at all, fearing stigma. In rural areas, the effect is especially glaring. Studies suggest that cultural and religious norms encourage silence (Alordiah et al., 2022, Arisukwu et al., 2021). For instance, Arisukwu et al. (2021) analysis noted that abuse may be "supported by culture and religion," which makes women "suffer in silence" instead of reaching out. Furthermore, Anifowose (2021) argues that if a rural woman is harmed, community members may consider it a private or moral issue, not a public one. This attitude deeply affects welfare. Medical staff or police might even rebuke a victim rather than aid her. Therefore, the lack of immediate care – whether medical treatment or refuge – means women suffer ongoing health and emotional damage.

Media and communication also influence welfare. While campaigns like #SayNoToRape have raised awareness (Collins-Dike et al., 2025), Ezeaka and Bartholomew (2025) point out that challenges remain, such as sensationalized reporting and victim-blaming narratives. In rural Nigeria, many women have limited access to digital media (Oyelude, 2024), so rumors and stigma spread unchecked. As Mensah et al. (2024) notes, when a story of abuse circulates, some villagers focus on the victim's behaviour instead of the crime. This environment of blame can make survivors afraid to report assaults or even seek medical care. Generally, the welfare issue shows that many rural Nigerian women do not receive the support they need after violence, because cultural

narratives shift sympathy away from them. Instead of emergency care and counseling, victims often face shame. Improving welfare therefore requires not only services (like clinics and shelters) but changing attitudes so victims are treated as people who deserve help, not as bearers of shame.

### Access

The access dimension examines whether women can reach resources – money, land, education, legal aid – which affect their ability to leave or recover from abuse. Cultural beliefs in rural Nigeria often restrict this access. A good example comes from the practice of bride-price. According to Ajayi (2020), paying a bride-price can make a woman feel like she has been paid for all her life, and this gives the husband a license to maltreat her. As Princewill (2019) reports, when a wife is seen as bought through bride-price, her access to autonomy is diminished. She may be unable to leave an abusive marriage or control her own body, because tradition places her under her husband's authority.

Early marriage and bride-price together severely limit access to education and skills. In their study of rural Nigeria, Agege et al. (2018), reported women saying that early marriage (common in poor families) denies the opportunity to be educated and forces girls into adulthood before they understand their rights. Because education is tied to empowerment, these girls remain economically dependent. In the same vein, Oladejo (2020) argues that the payment of bride-price makes it difficult for the girls to know their rights and speak out. In other words, cultural practices lock women into vulnerable positions. They cannot access schooling or training, which reduces their ability to earn income or even recognize abuse.

Even access to help-seeking and justice is circumscribed by culture. According to Olusegun and Oyelade (2022), rural women often lack transportation, money, or supportive contacts to reach police, lawyers, or NGOs. When they do try to seek help, they may be discouraged. Arisukwu et al. (2021) found that many rural women do not even consider early marriage a bad practice. This reflects how culture blinds them to abuse. If a wife is violated, she may feel she cannot challenge her husband because community structures (family, elders, religious authorities) implicitly side with men. Enemo (2020) also noted that rural women are often not part of the justice delivery mechanisms – key decisions are made by men. Thus, women's access to legal recourse is minimal.

Finally, traditional healing or community arbitration may substitute for formal services, but these are not always unbiased. For instance, Ogunwale et al. (2019) posit that local leaders may not consider rape or beatings as crimes needing intervention. Instead, they might cover violent practices from being seen as violence. For example, if a woman is beaten, elders may counsel a patient rather than escort her to a clinic. This social cover means women often do not access the resources (medical aid, legal protection, psychological counseling) that could help them heal and assert their rights. These studies highlight that cultural norms restrict rural women's access to support and opportunities. Practices like bride-price and early marriage trap women in dependent roles. Those who suffer violence lack access to the services and resources they need to escape or recover. This is a call not just to expand services (e.g. rural clinics, legal aid) but also to change norms that prevent women from even seeking help.

### Conscientization

The third dimension, conscientization, refers to awareness and understanding of gender inequality. It asks whether women (and men) recognize harmful norms and question them. In rural Nigeria, victim-blaming narratives often prevent this critical awareness. Many women have been socialized to accept abuse as "normal" or deserved (Arisukwu et al., 2021; Fakunmoju & Rasool, 2018). Arisukwu et al. (2021) report that in Kuje (a rural area), women sometimes accept some form of domestic violence as normal, believing they are the problem and not their abusive partners. This internalized belief means victims may not even realize they have rights, much less demand them. Culture and religion play a big role. In the same study, the authors note that culture can cover some violent practices from being seen as what it is (Alordiah et al., 2022; Arisukwu et al., 2022; Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022) – violence against women. When violence is justified by tradition, people come to see it as acceptable. In practice, this means rural women may not label certain acts as abuse. A husband's control, beatings, or sexual coercion may be seen as the husband's prerogative. Even family members might view a wife's complaint as betrayal.

The lack of conscientization shows up in how communities respond. In Arisukwu's study, respondents said that religious and cultural expectations teach women to be obedient to husbands, and the idea of divorce is strongly discouraged. Many women reported that their own families would not support them if they left an abusive marriage, leading them to blame themselves for provoking the abuse. This reflects how deep the victim-blaming narrative goes: women learn that it is their fault if something goes wrong, so they do not speak up.

Media and education affect conscientization. A few media campaigns (for example, JusticeForUwa in 2020) began to challenge myths (Sunday et al., 2021), but such messages often do not reach remote areas. Studies found that women with higher education were more likely to recognize abuse for what it is, while those without formal schooling were less likely (Arisukwu et al., 2021; Obiagu, 2023). This suggests that rising education levels can

help break the silence. For now, however, the majority of rural women remain under the influence of narratives that legitimize violence or blame victims. This makes the conscientization issue necessary in order to get more women informed on their rights. Many victims and witnesses in rural Nigeria do not identify the violence as unjust. They have been taught by culture and tradition to rationalize or even enforce abuse.

### **Mobilization**

The fourth level according to Langwe is mobilization. This involves women coming together to recognize and analyze the problems and identify ways to overcome discriminatory practices and build collective action to remove these practices. It also involves women taking part in decisions that affect them; from family choices to community leadership and policymaking. Studies suggest that victim-blaming narratives significantly limit rural women's participation (e.g., Nwakanma & Erundu, 2021). In many villages, social norms exclude women from important forums. For example, Arisukwu et al. (2021) note that in some rural Nigerian communities, women sometimes are not part of the justice delivery mechanisms. Men's interest comes first. This means women have no voice in how abuse cases are handled or how support programmes are designed. Even within families, decision-making is male dominated (Ajibadeet al, 2021). A woman who suffers abuse may find that nobody asks for her side of the story when elders or police question the case. Instead, male relatives or community leaders make decisions about keeping the peace. In practical terms, this exclusion means that interventions often proceed without input from survivors. Programmes may be designed in urban offices or by NGOs without consulting the affected women.

Furthermore, the culture of shame means many women self-exclude. Some survivors internalize the blame so much that they withdraw from community life. There are reports of women who, after abuse, stop attending village meetings or church gatherings out of fear of gossip (Veen et al., 2018). A few studies even mention cases where survivors moved to hide their pain (Ikuteyijo et al., 2023; Oloyede, 2020), which removes them from any participatory processes. Interestingly, the internalization of patriarchal values can lead to situations where even other women police survivors. One study found that some rural women themselves ignorantly support and sometimes enforce abusive acts against other women (Iloka & Eze, 2022). This shows how participation is impeded not only by men but also by the collective mindset. When women begin to see abuse as normal, they may collude in silencing survivors rather than offering support.

The lack of participation extends to formal politics as well. Rural women in most cases have minimal representation in local government or traditional councils (Chukwudi et al., 2023). If women leaders do exist, they may lack the autonomy to challenge ingrained norms. Without being involved in decision-making, survivors cannot advocate for better services or legal changes. In short, current structures in rural Nigeria give women little power to influence outcomes after violence. Both cultural norms and institutional practices marginalize women's voices (Arisukwu et al., 2021). Improving participation will require deliberate inclusion. For instance, making sure women are on community security committees or consultative groups on gender issues. It also calls for women's organizations to be strengthened so they can represent survivors.

### **Control**

According to Longwe, the final and deepest level is control. This refers to women having equal say and power over resources and decisions in society. Longwe (1995) noted that this level is reached when women have taken action so that there is gender equality in decision-making over access to resources, so that women achieve direct control over their access to resources. Here women take what is rightly theirs and no longer wait to be given resources at the pleasure of men. In rural Nigeria, patriarchal culture strongly curbs women's control. Victim-blaming narratives reinforce the idea that men are the default authorities, even in cases of violence against women. For example, elders or religious leaders might publicly say a wife should endure because that is her role, rather than hold the husband accountable.

Arisukwu et al. (2021) describes how various socio-cultural forces sustain domestic violence as a part of power dynamics. They note that in many villages, divorce is strictly discouraged and the woman's own family will usually not support her if she leaves her husband. Specifically, "Traditions and religious expectations of women make them remain obedient even in the face of abuse by their husbands. This passage highlights how cultural control is exerted. A woman has no route out of an abusive situation. In other words, domestic violence is sustained through the complicated interplay of culture, traditions, patriarchy and the negative masculine construct (Mshweshwe, 2020).

At the level of material resources, men retain ultimate control. Women often cannot own land or businesses without a male guarantor (Azuakor, 2021). Any money given to women (for example through microfinance) is sometimes considered temporary. According to Azuakor (2021), even property inheritance can favour males. These patterns of control mean that a woman's ability to recover from violence is very limited. Even if she escapes immediate danger, she likely has no independent means to support herself. Control is thus the hardest dimension. It requires changing deep-seated power structures. Without altering the patriarchal system, women will remain

dependent. In other words, as long as men have all the power, victim-blaming narratives will continue. Achieving control for rural women means giving them genuine authority in marriage, family and community affairs, and ensuring that cultural norms honor that authority.

### Implications of study findings

The findings of this study have three key implications. First, they show that victim-blaming in rural Nigeria is embedded within cultural and institutional systems. This means that interventions must target not only individuals but also community norms, service delivery practices, and decision-making structures that reinforce women's subordination. Second, the study highlights the need for more culturally sensitive and gender-responsive programming. Empowerment initiatives must integrate awareness-raising and involve men, traditional leaders and faith actors if they are to shift long-standing narratives that limit women's welfare, access, participation, and control.

Third, the study demonstrates that service providers, especially in health, justice and community governance, require stronger training to avoid reproducing harmful attitudes. Without such institutional changes, survivors may continue to face barriers that prevent them from seeking or receiving support. In all, the implications emphasize that meaningful progress requires a combination of cultural change, strengthened institutional responses and continued research to evaluate context-specific approaches to women's empowerment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To move beyond victim-blaming culture and support empowerment, we offer several recommendations.

- (i) *Raise awareness and shift norms.* Education campaigns should involve community and religious leaders, not just schools. Tackling attitudes through education is vital and local influencers can play a key role. For example, faith leaders could be trained to speak out against blaming victims. Radio programmes in local languages and village forums can explain that women are not at fault for abuse.
- (ii) *Improve access to survivor support.* This means expanding rural clinics, crisis centers and helplines that are sensitive to victim-blaming. Health and police personnel need gender-sensitivity training so they respond with care rather than judgment.
- (iii) *Promote conscientization and participation.* It is important to develop programmes that encourage critical dialogue within communities. For example, men's groups could meet to discuss gender roles and the harms of blaming women. Women's cooperatives and savings groups provide safe spaces for survivors to share experiences and build confidence.
- (iv) *Strengthening laws and their enforcement.* Nigeria's Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015) and other laws need full implementation. Authorities must hold abusers accountable regardless of the victim's status. Sensitization programmes for police and judges can help end practices like demanding bride-price as justification for abuse.
- (v) *All interventions should be culturally responsive and rooted in an African-centered feminist approach.* This means building on positive local values (such as communal care) and respecting indigenous knowledge. Programmes should empower women to frame solutions in their own terms. For instance, using local storytelling, proverbs, or music can counteract myths without seeming foreign.

### CONCLUSION

Our analysis found that victim-blaming attitudes and cultural norms in rural Nigeria undermine women's empowerment. Across all five dimensions of Longwe's framework, survivors of violence face significant barriers. Their immediate welfare needs are often ignored or stigmatized, as community members shift blame onto the victim. Access to resources like education, economic opportunity, and justice is limited by traditions such as early marriage and bride-price. Many women lack the conscientization needed to recognize abuse as unjust. In some cases, harmful practices are seen as normal by survivors themselves. Surviving women rarely participate in decisions about services or justice, since local structures are dominated by men and old practices exclude women. Eventually, women do not achieve control over their lives. Engrained patriarchy means they are discouraged from leaving abusive situations and remain dependent on male authority.

Existing service models, in many cases, fail to break this cycle. Instead of transforming power relations, they sometimes reinforce them by operating within the same cultural framework. Summarily, the evidence shows that rural women in Nigeria remain far from full empowerment. Cultural narratives that blame victims are pervasive, and they obstruct progress on all fronts. Longwe's framework highlights how each dimension of equality is affected. If these narratives persist, women's welfare, access, awareness, participation, and control will all remain limited. To change this, interventions must be transformative rather than purely procedural.

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