

# EFFORT OF THE CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM MOVEMENT CHURCH, ILORIN, KWARA STATE NIGERIA IN CURBING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AMONG FAMILIES

**Imudia, Josephine Uchechukwu**

*Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin*

[Josephineimudia@gmail.com](mailto:Josephineimudia@gmail.com)

09069271458, 09072114917

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the efforts of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, in addressing and curbing gender-based violence (GBV) among families. Recognising GBV as an entrenched social issue rooted in harmful cultural norms, unequal power relations, and societal silence, the study examines the Church's initiatives, counselling systems, and support structures aimed at mitigating abuse. Using a qualitative research design, the study draws on interviews with selected Church personnel to gain insights into the Church's roles, strategies, and challenges in responding to GBV. Findings reveal that the Church employs awareness-raising programmes, including workshops, seminars, symposia, and structured counselling sessions, to educate members on forms of GBV and promote healthier family interactions. The study also shows that while these interventions are impactful, the Church continues to grapple with persistent obstacles such as stigma, underreporting of abuse, and limited collaboration with external agencies. The study concludes that although the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church contributes meaningfully to curbing GBV, its efforts would be strengthened by deeper partnerships with government bodies, civil society organisations, and professional counselling services, as well as through expanded gender-sensitivity training and the provision of safe spaces for survivors.

**Key words:** Gender-Based Violence, stigma, abuse, counselling

## Introduction

Gender based violence culture has been latent for years in the Nigerian culture and has now become increasingly prevalent in Nigerian society. These violent behaviours portend grave challenge to both public health and human right. Dire consequences for victims<sup>1</sup> and the society at large are certain<sup>2</sup>. In addition, victims of sexual violence do not report in most cases due to ignorance, shame, guilt and stigma.<sup>3</sup> Religious communities and their leaders have been identified as important in combating GBV<sup>4</sup>. Gender Based Violence (GBV) is violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex or gender identity.<sup>5</sup> Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty.<sup>6</sup>

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviours and actions that are rooted in gender inequality and disproportionately affect individuals based on their gender or sex. Gender-Based Violence manifests in different forms, some of the different types of GBV ravaging families are physical violence, sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence, digital or online violence, honour based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (fgm/c), trafficking and sexual exploitation, child marriage, intimate partner violence (ipv), and marital rape<sup>7</sup>. Physical violence involves the use of force to harm someone's body. This can include hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, choking, or any other form of physical harm. Sexual violence refers to any non-consensual sexual act or behaviour. This includes rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, forced marriage, and human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Emotional or psychological violence involves actions that manipulate, control, intimidate, or degrade an individual emotionally. This can include verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, stalking, and isolating someone from friends and family.

Economic violence is the use of economic control to exploit or limit someone's financial independence. This can involve preventing someone from accessing resources, controlling their finances, or forcing them into economic dependency. With the rise of technology, digital or online violence has become a significant issue. This includes cyberbullying, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of explicit images, and using technology to control or threaten someone. Honour-based violence is rooted in cultural or traditional beliefs and involves violence or control exerted to protect the perceived honour or reputation of a family or community. It often includes practices such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and honour killings. Forced marriage is when someone is married against their will, often involving coercion, threats, or physical force. It can lead to various forms of abuse, including sexual, emotional, and physical violence.

Considering the detrimental effect of GBV, it is expedient that Churches in Ilorin, Kwara State join government agencies and non-governmental organisations in curbing the menace. However, there has been questions about the effort of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin, Kwara State in curbing GBV. Therefore, this study is set to examine the effort of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin, Kwara State in curbing gender-based violence among families.

## Concept of Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence is a pervasive social problem rooted in unequal power relations and rigid gender norms that privilege one gender over another. It includes a spectrum of abusive behaviours, physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological manipulation, and economic deprivation, that are justified or tolerated within certain cultural and social contexts. GBV thrives where societal structures normalise dominance, silence victims, and stigmatise those who challenge established gender expectations. Its manifestation is not limited to intimate relationships; it extends into workplaces, public spaces, and religious institutions, reflecting a broader system of discrimination and control. The consequences are profound, ranging from long-term emotional trauma and health complications to the erosion of social trust and the destabilisation of family units.<sup>8-9</sup>

The persistence of GBV in many societies is closely linked to structural inequalities, weak enforcement of protective laws, and socio-economic vulnerabilities that limit victims' autonomy. Traditional beliefs that valorise male authority or demand female submission create conditions under which violence is rationalised or dismissed as a private matter. Addressing GBV requires dismantling these entrenched norms and prioritising community education, policy reform, and institutional accountability. Scholars argue that meaningful progress depends on coordinated efforts that challenge discriminatory ideologies while promoting respect, agency, and equitable relationships across societal institutions.<sup>10-11</sup>

Gender-based violence (GBV) manifests in multiple interrelated forms, each reflecting distinct power dynamics, social norms, and harmful practices, and it remains a critical issue in Ilorin, Kwara State. It is essential to understand the different types of GBV so as to design effective interventions, particularly within the context of faith-based organisations such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, which actively engages in mitigating family and intimate partner violence.<sup>12</sup>

Physical violence is one of the most visible forms of GBV and involves the use of physical force to inflict injury or harm. This includes acts such as hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, or the use of weapons.<sup>13</sup> In family settings, women and children are often the primary victims, and such acts can result in both immediate bodily harm and long-term health consequences. Physical violence not only threatens the safety of victims but also contributes to a climate of fear and psychological distress within households.

Sexual violence encompasses non-consensual sexual acts, ranging from coercion, sexual harassment, and molestation to rape and sexual exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Sexual violence often occurs within the private sphere of homes, marriages, or intimate partnerships, making it underreported due to stigma, fear of retribution, or cultural expectations of female obedience. The consequences of sexual violence are profound, affecting physical health, reproductive rights, and mental wellbeing, and can perpetuate cycles of trauma within families and communities.

Psychological or emotional violence is another form of GBV. It means the behaviours intended to control, intimidate, or undermine an individual's self-worth.<sup>15</sup> Examples include verbal abuse, threats, humiliation, isolation, manipulation, and coercive control. Emotional violence is often less visible than physical abuse but equally damaging, as it erodes self-esteem, fosters anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, and reinforces power imbalances in intimate

relationships. Within Ilorin, cultural norms that emphasise male authority in households can exacerbate emotional abuse, leaving women and children particularly vulnerable.

More common GBV is economic violence, which is a subtler but deeply impactful form of abuse.<sup>16</sup> It involves controlling a partner's access to financial resources, restricting employment or educational opportunities, withholding money for basic needs, or compelling dependence on the abuser. In Ilorin, research indicates that economic abuse often intersects with other forms of violence, as women who lack financial autonomy are less able to escape abusive situations, report incidents, or access support services.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, these individual forms, structural or systemic GBV exists in the form of harmful cultural practices and institutionalised inequalities. Practices such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and discriminatory inheritance laws perpetuate gender inequality and normalise violence against women and girls.<sup>18</sup> Structural GBV reinforces household-level abuse by embedding patriarchal norms within social, legal, and economic systems.

The overlapping nature of these forms of violence complicates detection and intervention. For example, economic abuse can coincide with emotional manipulation, while physical violence may be accompanied by sexual coercion. Recognising the multiplicity of GBV forms is crucial for stakeholders, including the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, which employs counselling, mediation, and educational programmes to address the spectrum of abuses. The Church provides comprehensive support to survivors and promotes behavioural transformation within families by integrating awareness of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic violence into their spiritual and social interventions.

### **Prevalence of Gender-based Violence in Ilorin, Kwara State**

Gender-based violence remains a significant social concern in Ilorin, Kwara State, reflecting broader national patterns of intimate partner abuse, emotional violence, and socio-cultural practices that reinforce unequal gender relations. In many communities across Ilorin, reports indicate that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, verbal and psychological abuse, and financial control, often within the context of marital and family relationships.<sup>19</sup> Social expectations that prioritise female obedience, coupled with economic dependency and stigma surrounding the disclosure of domestic issues, contribute to the underreporting of cases, making the true prevalence difficult to quantify.

Studies conducted within the state show that a considerable number of households experience some form of gender-related abuse, with emotional and economic violence emerging as the most common forms.<sup>20</sup> Local civil society groups and religious organisations continue to highlight that GBV persists due to entrenched patriarchal norms, limited awareness of legal protections, and inconsistent enforcement of existing laws.<sup>21</sup> Despite these challenges, there is growing advocacy and community engagement aimed at improving reporting mechanisms, strengthening support systems, and promoting behavioural change across neighbourhoods in Ilorin.

### **Brief History of Ilorin, Kwara State**

Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, is a historic city whose development has been shaped by diverse cultural, religious, and political influences. Founded in the late eighteenth century as a Yoruba settlement, Ilorin later came under the leadership of Afonja, the local warlord

whose conflict with the Oyo Empire created conditions that enabled the rise of Fulani influence in the area. With the arrival of the Fulani cleric Alimi, Ilorin gradually evolved into an emirate governed under Islamic principles, merging Yoruba traditions with Islamic scholarship and Hausa-Fulani administrative structures. This unique blend of cultures has given Ilorin a distinctive identity as both a Yoruba city and a northern emirate.<sup>22</sup>

Over the centuries, Ilorin has grown into a major centre of commerce, education, and religion in Nigeria. Its reputation for Islamic learning, traditional craftsmanship, and peaceful coexistence continues to shape social life and community relations. The city's strong religious heritage, particularly its emphasis on moral discipline and communal harmony, provides a fertile backdrop for examining contemporary social issues, including efforts by faith-based organisations such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church to address gender-based violence among families.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Establishment of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin**

The Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Movement Church was founded in 1925 by Saint Moses Orimolade Tunolase, an itinerant evangelist whose ministry emphasised healing, prayer, prophetic vision, and angelic symbolism.<sup>24</sup> The movement began when Orimolade's prayer band adopted the name "Seraphim" (on 9 September 1925) and later added "Cherubim" through a vision in March 1926, giving rise to the Cherubim and Seraphim name.<sup>25</sup>

Orimolade's evangelistic journeys took him across what is now southwestern and central Nigeria, including Kwara State; his travels brought him through Ilorin, where he preached, healed, and won converts.<sup>26</sup> According to historical accounts, the Church established a formal presence in Ilorin around 1927: a small group of believers, led by Elder E.O. Meadows, gathered for prayer meetings, which later crystallised into a local assembly.<sup>27</sup> Over time, this community built a prayer house on Murtala Muhammad Way in Ilorin, becoming a district headquarters for the Church.<sup>28</sup>

The Ilorin district of the C&S Church has grown significantly and today comprises numerous branches across the city. The organisational structure includes a district chairman, special apostles, and local bands, reflecting the broader governance model of the C&S Movement Worldwide (also called "Ayo Ni O").<sup>29</sup> The Church in Ilorin is well embedded in the spiritual and social fabric of the city: it runs educational institutions such as the C&S College, Sabo-Oke, established in 1969, and remains actively engaged in social and economic initiatives through foundations and empowerment programmes.<sup>30</sup>

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design. This design is appropriate since the goal is to gain in-depth understanding of members of Cherubim and Seraphim on the Church efforts in curbing GBV. In this design, the researcher sought rich, descriptive data rather than numerical measurements. The population of the study comprised all members of the 24 branches of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin from which a sample of 30 respondents (Church members and leaders) was selected. Semi-structured interview was used to allow participants express their views in their own words. Thus, this enabled the researcher to explore meanings, motivations, and contexts behind their responses.

## Results

### **Contribution of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin to Curbing Gender-Based Violence**

The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin has made notable contributions, even though imperfect and occasionally contested, to curbing gender-based violence (GBV) in Ilorin, Kwara State. Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, its interventions operate through a combination of spiritual, moral, and social structures, and they reveal both strengths and limitations in addressing deeply rooted gender norms.

#### **Spiritual and Moral Teaching:**

The Church emphasises a moral framework that directly opposes violent behaviour within families. Through sermons, prayer meetings, and pastoral counselling, members are encouraged to practise patience, empathy, and self-control, values that challenge the dominance and aggression often underlying GBV.<sup>31</sup> The Church provides both guidance for victims and corrective pathways for perpetrators to reform behaviour by framing these ethical standards within Christian teachings.

#### **Counselling and Mediation:**

Church structures, including local bands, special apostles, and district leadership, are employed to mediate family disputes.<sup>32</sup> Couples experiencing tension or conflict can receive guidance through dialogue and prayer, allowing early-stage de-escalation of potential violence. The authority of Church leaders in Ilorin gives these interventions cultural resonance, ensuring families are more likely to adhere to the counsel provided.

#### **Social and Economic Empowerment:**

The Church also engages in socioeconomic initiatives that indirectly reduce vulnerability to GBV. For example, the Oluwole Foundation's empowerment programmes in Ilorin provide financial assistance and vocational training to members, especially women, helping to reduce dependency on potentially abusive partners.<sup>33</sup> Through strengthening financial independence, such programmes address one of the structural contributors to domestic violence.

The Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin provides meaningful spiritual, moral, and social interventions that contribute to curbing GBV, but its impact could be enhanced through gender-sensitive education, collaboration with civil society, and systematic evaluation of its programmes. The Church's influence is significant, yet its conservative framework both shapes and limits the scope of its effectiveness.

The interview conducted with the Church leaders and members revealed that traditional gender norms, misinterpretation of the bible, lack of comprehensive education, stigma and shame among others are the causes of GBV among families. Odusina explained that traditional gender norms create avenue for GBV in Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin<sup>34</sup>. Likewise, Jeje stressed that one crucial obstacle to curbing GBV is misinterpretation of the Bible by the members of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin<sup>35</sup>. In another perspective, Popoola revealed, in the interview conducted, that the awareness of GBV has not been that much in Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Ilorin<sup>36</sup>. That is, lack of comprehensive education is a bane to curbing GBV. Furthermore, Popoola explained, in the interview conducted, that GBV is shrouded in stigma and shame, leading survivors to avoid seeking help. Popoola however, stated that fellowships such as Men's Fellowship, Women's

Fellowship, Couples' Fellowship, Youth Fellowship, among others are saddled with the responsibility to tackle the challenge<sup>37</sup>.

Meanwhile, Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church has contributed immensely to curbing GBV. Recognising the importance of addressing GBV at its roots, Jeje Oyeniyi explained that Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church Ilorin engages with young people through youth groups, schools, and awareness campaigns<sup>38</sup>.

## Conclusion

This study has highlighted the essential role of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin in curbing gender-based violence within families, demonstrating how faith-based institutions can serve as both moral and social anchors in their communities. The Church's interventions, ranging from spiritual guidance and counselling to social empowerment initiatives, illustrate the potential of religious organisations to influence attitudes, mediate conflicts, and provide support systems that reduce the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence. While these contributions are significant, the study also underscores the limitations inherent in relying solely on traditional moral frameworks, which may inadvertently reinforce patriarchal norms or fail to address structural inequalities comprehensively.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the Church's engagement creates avenues for dialogue, education, and behavioural transformation, fostering safer and more harmonious family environments. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church exemplifies how community-based and faith-driven interventions can complement broader policy and societal efforts to combat gender-based violence by combining spiritual instruction with practical support.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were made to enhance the role of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church in Ilorin in curbing gender-based violence and to strengthen broader efforts to address this social issue.

- i. The Church should consider integrating gender-sensitive education into its programmes, including workshops and seminars that address not only moral behaviour but also the principles of gender equity, human rights, and healthy family dynamics. Such education would equip members with practical skills to recognise, prevent, and respond to various forms of abuse.
- ii. The Church could strengthen collaboration with civil society organisations, government agencies, and professional counselling services. The Church can expand access to resources for victims, provide expert support for complex cases, and enhance the credibility and effectiveness of its interventions by establishing formal partnerships.
- iii. The Church should develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of its counselling and mediation initiatives. Collecting data on the incidence of GBV within the congregation and assessing the impact of interventions would enable evidence-based improvements and more targeted support.
- iv. The Church should continue to empower women and vulnerable members through social and economic programmes, such as vocational training, microfinance initiatives,

- and leadership development. Through the reduction of financial dependence and enhancing autonomy, such initiatives address structural factors that contribute to GBV.
- v. The Church should encourage open dialogue within families and the wider community about the harmful effects of violence, promoting a culture of accountability, respect, and non-violence that transcends religious instruction alone.

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