



## A Critical Review on Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Media Dimension

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**Abstract:** During the Covid-19 pandemic, women and girls around the world have been subjected to sexual and physical violence, which has never happened before. Women are killed in the name of honor in Asia and the Middle East, while girls in West Africa are subjected to genital mutilation in the name of tradition. Because the perpetrators believe that sex with virgins will cure them of their disease, young girls in Southern Africa are raped and infected with HIV/AIDS. According to the findings, the majority of Nigerian women have been victims of gender-based violence, such as incest, rape, physical abuse, verbal abuse, denial of food, forced marriage, and early child marriage. The findings of the study also revealed that age, employment, educational attainment, witnessing a mother being beaten as a child, family type, duration of union, participation in household decision-making, employment status relative to woman, differences in educational qualification between a male partner and woman, attitudes toward wife-beating among men and women, and male right to discipline or control females are all factors that contribute to gender-based violence. Sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, physical injuries, immediate psychological reactions such as shock, shame, guilt, and anger; and long-term psychological outcomes such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, lack of sexual pleasure, and fears are all health consequences of gender-based violence. The study concludes that gender-based violence has a negative impact not only on women and their reproductive health but also on Nigeria's economy and progress.

**Keywords:** Gender violence, Gender discrimination, Partner violence and Patriarchal system.

### Research Paper

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**How to cite this paper:**

Ojemeiri Karl Airaoje, Aruaye Afeye Obada, Aondover Eric Msughter (2023). A Critical Review on Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: Media Dimension. *Middle East Res J. Humanities Soc. Sci.*, 3(2): 9-16.

**Article History:**

| Submit: 25.07.2023 |  
| Accepted: 29.08.2023 |  
| Published: 31.08.2023 |

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## INTRODUCTION

In Asia and the Middle East, women are battered and killed in the name of prestige. Girls in Africa are subjected to genital mutilation because they believe in culture and tradition, which has been practiced and sustained from generation to generation, while in Western Europe travelers and refugee women face the challenges of persecution because they refuse to accept and conform to their host community's standard of morals and values. In the Southern part of Africa, virgin ladies are raped by men and infected with HIV/AIDS because they believe that having sexual intercourse with these women will heal them of their diseases. On the other hand and in the world's wealthiest and most industrialized nations, women are also beaten to death by their partners (Amnesty International, 2004).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an ancient patriarchal system of oppression with global coverage, and serious public health problems that jeopardize women's health, which has a high incidence of occurrence in the underdeveloped countries of the world (Christiana *et al.*, 2006; Garcia-Moreno & Pallitto, 2013; Msughter *et al.*, 2020). As a result of the various dimensions and demonstrations of GBV in different countries of the world, it has directly affected the societal position and credence given to women in the global society. Apart from affecting their societal positions even in the global economy, it has universally increased the morbidity of women and mortality of children generally (Garca-Moreno & Pallitto, 2013). GBV, being a man's tool of dominance against women, is a human rights violation against women that occurs worldwide, which is found in both developing and advanced industrialized

nations of the world; irrespective of cultural values and status, socioeconomic class, or religious background of such people, and it differs in regularity, form, and extent from one country to another (World Bank, 2019). In the strong era of the Covid-19 i.e 2020-2021, above 243 million women and girls between the ages of 15 to 49 were victims of sexual and physical violence in the world. Statistically, these figures were more compared to any other historically.

According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), gender-based violence against women is violence directed primarily against a woman because she is a woman; a weaker vessel. Furthermore, violence against women is recognized as a kind of gender discrimination that stems from historically unequal power relations between the male and female, which successfully prevents women from having the same rights and freedoms in society as their male counterparts. Similarly, CEDAW considers gender-based violence against women to be one of the most fundamental social, political, cultural, and economic systems that perpetuate women's enslavement, including their subjugation to males and their assigned roles in human civilizations. According to the CEDAW, the term GBV further enhances comprehension of this violence as a cultural and social problem rather than an individual one, demanding urgent and systemic solutions rather than treating the incidents and occurrences separately in any part of the world (CEDAW, 2017).

According to Peterman *et al.*, (2020) GBV manifested and attained a peak height during the COVID-19 pandemic, as revealed by statistical figures in several nations throughout the world. According to UNFPA (2020), cultures with patriarchal ideas (traditions that consider a male child as supreme over the female) have some of the highest incidence rates of male committed GBV, expressing drastically unequal gender roles by lowering and assigning women to inferior roles in such culture; maligning their lives and destiny.

In addition, gender discrimination in such cultures begins at an early age, as young girls are compelled to marry against their will, as is the situation in several African countries, including Nigeria (Gibbs *et al.*, 2020; The Guardian, 9th July 2020). Unfortunately, in such societies, a sizable proportion of both men and women support GBV, which reduces the chances of critical and inventive aid or the means to proffer solutions. As a result, the cultural ideas of these men and women have tremendously contributed to both empowering, sustaining, and preserving this uncivilized aggression or gender battle for supremacy, against women especially.

In 2020, another GBV public health catastrophe erupted as different governments of the world and countries tried to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Statistically, there was an increasing figure of

GBV in the world as the lockdown order was imposed to ensure minimal transmission of the Pandemic (NZFVC, 2020; WHO, 2020). According to Fraser (2020), studies on the influence of pandemics on gender-based violence have prior revealed that male perpetrated gender violence always rises during emergencies such as epidemics and pandemics historically. Given this, the United Nations Population Fund projected that 15 million cases of the GBV would be documented every three months in different parts of the world if the lockdown order is imposed globally (UNFPA, 2020).

GBV did not first appear in Nigeria in the same year as the COVID-19 Pandemic; it has been present in the country before the Pandemic and its lockdown in 2020, which was experienced by different countries of the world. This is supported by a report from the National Demographic Health Survey (2013), which indicated that GBV affects women of all social, economic, ethnic, and different cultural backgrounds in Nigeria; affecting 28 percent of women. Early and forced marriages, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, are all manifestations and part of violence commonly practiced in Nigeria. According to UNFPA (2020), with over a decade of insurgency activity that has been going on in Nigeria, the incidence of GBV is increasing at an alarming rate in the country, particularly in the North-Eastern Region. As a result, political instability in Nigeria has increased, with the manifestation of different degrees of violence and crime occurring every day. Based on the available facts, there are insufficient literature studies on the subject, especially a critical review on the subject matter. Thus, the research team was able to review all of the relevant and current literature to gain a proper understanding of the issue at hand. In this context, the study looked at the causes of gender-based violence in Nigeria, as well as the economic impacts, effects, and the factors that enhance GBV in Nigeria.

### Basic Tools of Scientific Inquiries

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of gender-based violence in Nigeria?
2. What are the economic impacts of gender-based violence on Nigeria's economy?
3. What are the health effects of gender-based violence in Nigeria?
4. What are the factors that enhance gender-based violence in Nigeria?

### Literature Review

GBV perpetrated by an intimate spouse or by a non-partner has affected 35% of women during the active years of their lives (WHO, 2018). Furthermore, according to a WHO research on worldwide and regional estimates of GBV, 30% of women have globally experienced IPV in their entire lifetime as women, while in Africa alone 37% of women have been statistically

revealed. According to data from the Nigerian National Population Commission, GBV, as experienced by the Nigerian women throughout their lifetime from either their present husband, is reported as 19% for demonstrative or emotional violence, 14% for physical violence, and 5% for sexual abuse. Before this time, a study done in Nigeria has indicated that the proportion of GBV ranges from 31 to 61 percent for emotional and mental violence, 20 to 31 percent for sex-related violence, and 7 to 31 percent for physical and bodily violence (Mapayi *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, research in different parts of Nigeria has found that the occurrence and prevalence of GBV in the northern part of Nigeria is between 42 percent (Tanimu *et al.*, 2018) to 29 percent in the southwest (Okenwa *et al.*, 2018), 78.8 percent in the southeastern part, and 41 percent in the south-south region (Dienye *et al.*, 2018; Okemgbo *et al.*, 2018).

As the data above illustrate, violence and sexual abuse against women have risen substantially. The killing of women, sexual and domestic abuse, and other types of gender-based violence continue to impact millions of women and girls worldwide. As these statistics have continuously increased, feminist groups and Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) have to shout aloud globally to call the attention of the world to prevent violence against women and pursue a reformist agenda to achieve gender equality between men and women. In a bid to achieve their goal, they further encounter false accusations, sexual assault, bullying, and sometimes even murder as threats regularly. The problem heightens when the WHRD challenges the cultural or religious notions that perpetuate gender inequality in society.

State and non-state institutions, such as organized crime, business groupings, religious fundamentalism that targets women, persons who oppose gender standards, and women's human rights organizations, are growing and advancing daily in their plans according to the Generation Equality Forum (2021). Tremendous hate speeches of all sorts and high public demands for violence against these groups are becoming more widespread among authoritarian regimes and oppressive forces all across the world to frustrate any attempt to achieve gender equality in the world.

In Nigeria, one out of every four females is a victim of sexual violence before they turn the age of eighteen. This is usually preceded in some communities by the practice of early and forced marriage in the name of culture, ethnicity, or religion (National Population Commission, 2014). For example, 67.6 percent of girls in the North-West and 56.6 percent of girls in the North-East are forcefully given out to marriage before they get to the age of eighteen (NBS & UNICEF, 2017). Similarly, FGM has been reported as 49 percent in both girls and women who are between the ages of 15 to 49 years in the South-East and 47.5 percent of girls and women between the ages of 15 to 49 years in the South-

West (ICF International, 2014). Violence remains even in adulthood; 17.4 percent of girls and women between the ages of 15 to 49 had been brutally, physically, or sexually abused by their romantic partners at least once in their life (ICF International, 2014). Abduction, attacks on sex workers, resource denial, domestic violence, and early and forced marriage have all been prevalent and are still pervasive in Nigeria's north-eastern region. In Zamfara State (Nigeria) specifically, sexual violence, partner violence, and conflict-related sexual violence are perpetuated and are seriously on the rise in Zamfara State as of 2020 (Nagarajan, 2020).

### Theoretical Framework

According to Msughter *et al.*, (2020), radical feminists contend that society is a patriarchal system in which men greatly exercise dominance over the classes of women in the society. It is a feminist theory that begins with the idea of a fundamental struggle between the sexes, as well as women's oppression as a direct consequence or effect of patriarchy in any culture. Furthermore, this theory implies that every social behavior is the result or expression of some form of people's constraint and compulsion. Although diverse sorts of communicative constraints exist in every social structure, they do not have to result in the suppression and subjugation of women in society. However, under a patriarchal control system, interpersonal connections and communication are constrained to the point that rigidity develops and is perpetuated, which is seen as an oppressive approach to achieving their goals. In the home and society, women are viewed as second-class citizens, even in positions of power in the government. While patriarchy is prevalent, a fundamental power struggle exists between the sexes. As a result, radical feminism is founded on the belief that gender inequality is at the root of all the sufferings, persecutions, injustices, and oppressions unleashed in the global society of women (Vukoi, 2017).

This study promotes Radical Feminism Theory. It is a modern-day social and political movement rooted in the premise that society is structured on patriarchal principles, in which men are privileged to rule over their female counterparts globally. Gender discrimination is common in both public and private life of women. Even though there are different ways to discriminate against women, the main contrast between them is the extent to which patriarchal society interactions are seen as the root of all forms of discrimination against women.

The major difference between radical feminism and any other kind of oppression is that the social structure based on gender power struggles is viewed as the cause of all subsequent dominance, oppression, inequality, and injustice. This just adds to the argument that a patriarchal society is a fundamentally unequal system in which women experience a wide range of discrimination and exploitation. Gender inequality, according to radical feminist theory, is the foundation for

all other injustices and oppressions against womanhood. The slavery of women by patriarchy (a hierarchical structure of male dominance over the female gender) necessitates power, which causes repression and believes that life will be empty without it.

With the widespread practice and establishment of the patriarchal system in most cultures around the world, women face a high level of violence and deprivation on a wide range of personal and social issues, to the point where women spend their entire lives unable to reach their conclusions on matters affecting their individual lives or persons. This condition has become considered normal, making it difficult for women who pay attention to their intuitive senses to comprehend. Patriarchy is disadvantageous and a great injustice to women because, within its rules and values system, patriarchy allows for the use of physical and other forms of societal violence against women who breach conceptual norms and standards of conduct in such a society. Reduced or erased constraints, on the contrary, would result in a loss of control and unpredictable reactions from women, whose behavior would be influenced by their perceptions rather than firmly set standards (Slater, 1991).

## METHODOLOGY

This research is primarily based on secondary sources of materials such as relevant texts, journals, magazines, newspapers, official publications, historical documents, and the Internet, all of which served as tangible sources for the research work. However, the investigation was limited to specific data from scholarly journals, books, and the Internet about gender violence, violence against women and girls, and gender-based violence.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### **RQ1: What are the causes of gender-based violence in Nigeria?**

According to a report, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund), carried out a serious and important evaluation of 122 civil society organizations that were given grants in 2020 from the fund. The funded organizations stated that there is a great surge and rising figures globally in all forms of GBV and Nigeria is not exempted. Similarly, they added that unemployment, economic insecurity, food shortages, school closures (due to the COVID-19 Pandemic), public transportation shutdowns, and massive migration flows are all factors contributing to GBV in Nigeria (UN Women, 2020).

Gage and Thomas (2017), as well as Oyerinde and Fayisetan (2017), have discovered other similar characteristics that protect but at the same time put women at risk of GBV in Nigeria, most notably IPV. A few of these factors include age, work opportunities, salary structure, educational qualification and

attainment, a child witnessing his mother being beaten, family background, the length of time of the union, involvement in the household decision-making process, the use of alcohol by a partner, the employment status of the partner relative to his wife, inequalities in educational qualifications between a male and female partner, common attitudes toward wife-beating between men and women, and the traditional right of male to control female behavior in the communities where GBV is a common practice. Wife-beating and battering are also driven by infractions such as refusing to respect a husband, having adulterous affairs, refusing to have sexual intercourse, leaving the house without a warrant from the man, keeping bad company, abusing alcohol, cooking bad food, or cooking late most times, and showing disdain for in-laws. Poverty, spying, direct interference in a husband's hidden affairs, evil, loss of integrity, insensitive temperament, power battle, and frustration are among the elements that contribute to GBV (Adebayo, 2003).

Another aspect that contributes to GBV is purely a psychological issue. Psychological theories under this causal component focus on the makeup qualities and mental features of the individual. This personality type is characterized by spontaneous outbursts of anger, a lack of or deficiency in the control of impulse, and a very low self-image of the perpetrator. According to Walton and Pavlos (2015), psychopathology and other personality disorders are among the causes of GBV. He also mentioned that some people become more violent as adults as a result of childhood abuse. Furthermore, according to Bueso-Izquierdo (2018), guys who abuse their wives develop abnormal dispositions at a young age that interferes with their rational intelligence (2018). Despite this, these theoretical approaches have been called into question due to their limitations. According to them, social factors are extremely important, whereas personality traits, psychiatric disorders, and sociopathy are of little significance. Mental anxiety, observational interactions, psychiatric problems, power control, and jealousy, according to Mboho and Raphael (2018), are among the factors that contribute to GBV.

### **RQ2: What are the economic impacts of gender-based violence on Nigeria's economy?**

The economic costs of violence against women and girls are suffered by the entire community, whether explicitly or implicitly in any country, society, or community setting where these practices are very common. The cost includes the expenditures of providing the victim with health care services and responding to an inquiry in a court setting (Johnson & Dawson, 2011). Because GBV is most of the time injurious or has damaging consequences on the victim, its financial burden is very high. According to Puri (2016), GBV cost within the angle of the government, private sectors, and social philanthropists is estimated to be 2% of the world's GDP, which is approximately 1.5

trillion USD. With the continuous domination of men in the civilisation of the world, the aforementioned figure has skyrocketed.

According to Desmidt and Neat (2020), there was a rapid increase of 49 percent in recurrent reports of gender-based violence after the Federal Government of Nigeria implemented some COVID-19 reduction measures in March 2020; especially the 'stay at home order' that was primarily intended to reduce the spray of the virus. Furthermore, the Managing Conflict in Nigeria Group discovered that there was a 56 percent increase in reports of gender-based violence between mid-March and the first week of April 2020, which was followed by two weeks of lockdown or restriction in the country to contain the virus and flatten the curve (British Council, 2020). Similarly, according to Diffa data in the Niger State of Nigeria, GBV has skyrocketed since March 2020. Between January and September 2020, there was an incremental report of GBV cases, which had a little decline in February 2020, but there was a significant rise in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 order that was implemented (UNHCR, 2020). The British Council (2020) reported that gender-based violence has caused a direct impact on the economic insecurity and rapidly increasing poverty in the nation, food scarcity, increased tensions and stress in various communities with high GBV practice, and serious medical complications for the victims.

Gender-based violence has global economic effects, regardless of a country's growth in technology, and Nigeria is not exempted from its general and economic implications. It has a very high economic impact and cost in Nigeria. Its economic impact in Nigeria is usually felt in the areas related to prevention, intervention, and opportunity costs. The victims, family members, neighborhood groups, the government, civil society organizations, and private employers of laborers are frequently on the hook for the costs of GBV in Nigeria. The help, on the other hand, maybe in the form of tangible or intangible services. Some of these expenses include hospital health care, the justice system, lost wages, and second-generation costs, which include the costs of children experiencing and living with violence their entire lives (UN Women, 2020). In most cases, these costs have no immediate and obvious consequences, but they do have long-term multidimensional effects on society and national economies. Similarly, World Bank estimated that GBV costs 1.2 to 3.7 percent of global GDP based on cost calculations for various countries (World Bank, 2018).

### **RQ3: What are the health effects of gender-based violence in Nigeria?**

Women who are sexually attacked, such as those battered by their intimate partners and spouses, face substantial health, social, and economic implications, which may be instantaneous or delayed based on the gravity of the injuries sustained by the

victim. Attempted sexual harassment, according to Akinlusi *et al.*, (2014), might have a similar effect and magnitude on the victim as an already completed one. According to him, the medical or health effects of gender-based violence include sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies, illegal abortions, permanent trauma, instantaneous behavioral reactions such as shock, shame, guilt, and anger; and long-term psychological outcomes such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal tendencies, decreased sexual pleasure, and anxieties. Other unfavorable health impacts include mental instability, gynecological difficulties, miscarriage, and injuries or scars that will take time to be healed and even forgotten.

According to a WHO (2013) report on violence against women, women who have been sexually abused by non-partners are 2.3 times quite likely to use alcohol and drugs and 2.6 times more likely to experience clinical depression or melancholy. In addition, women who have been sexually abused by partners are 1.5 times more likely to have sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, Gonorrhoea, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), Genital Warts, and Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Genital Herpes (HSV-1, HSV-2), and Syphilis. Most of these victims are not ready to tell other persons that they are infected because the majority of them are frightened of being ostracized if they disclose their condition to seek aid. Nigeria has one of the world's lowest rates of help-seeking behavior as regards GBV acts in the world, with females accounting for 23 percent of the population in the North-Eastern, which is the lowest rate in the nation (World Bank, 2019). Furthermore, the World Bank reported that 45 percent of women between the ages of 15 to 49 who have encountered physical or sexual violence as a form of GBV never confessed it, while 31 percent sought treatment, and 12 percent notified someone but never sought a medical solution.

In addition, young girls who marry at a young age are more prone to acquire a vesicovaginal fistula (VVF). It is a fistulous tube that connects the bladder and the vagina and allows urine to leak into the vagina dome unknowingly. It is caused by foetal incompatibility and immature pelvis bones, as well as substantial laceration of the reproductive organs produced by these young girls' thin pelvis, which frequently results in fistula and stillbirths due to severe bleeding induced by obstructed and long labor. According to a UNICEF study, Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa, with over 23 million girls and women married as minors, the vast majority of them coming from impoverished and rural communities (UNICEF, 2018). This is because the daughter of a poor family is typically viewed by her parents as a commodity that may be sold through marriage to improve the family's fortunes and standard of living. Her age and consent become irrelevant as soon as a wealthy person is found for her to marry. Most Nigerian communities, particularly in the north, do not consider this practice to be a form of GBV because it is

explicitly endorsed by the religious and cultural beliefs of the people.

#### **RQ4: What are the factors that enhance gender-based violence in Nigeria?**

History reveals that women have been relegated to second-class status for ages, while men have always ruled human civilization and dominated their female counterparts through patriarchal cultural beliefs. In most of the global communities of the world, these cultural beliefs have vested so much reference and preference to the male child in the global society. In Arabian culture, for example, the birth of a female child is viewed as a source of shame and humiliation just because of their cultural ideology. On the contrary, the birth of a male child is highly esteemed and celebrated with happiness. Similarly, due to the predilection for male offspring, the birth of a male child in Nigeria, particularly in the south geopolitical zone, thrills family members more than the birth of a girl child. This behavior frustrates the female child as she grows, and women in Nigeria, like women all around the world, are subjected to gender-based abuse regardless of their age, ethnicity, educational qualification, socioeconomic class, or religious practice (Zakariya, 2021).

GBV is aggravated in society because men are depicted as more significant, powerful, educated, creative, and intelligent, whereas women are portrayed as the polar opposite of all of these qualities mentioned in male characteristics. GBV is also aggravated in society as a result of the ways certain parents raise their children, which creates a gender gap. For example, if a male grows up thinking that he is not meant to wash his clothes or help around the house, and then marries a lady from a home where tasks are shared among girls and boys, this might lead to resentment and violence as the man attempts to impose his dominance in his house. According to Ezeh and Gage (2008), violence against women may be traced back to the implementation of strict authority and decisions to create an atmosphere of gender disparity that allows for constant superiority and dominance over the female fox.

GBV is exacerbated by the Islamic religion, which upholds and reinforces the traditional value of marrying off virgin girls as soon as feasible or before they are deflowered by their male counterparts. This is particularly typical in rural areas where traditional values are still highly esteemed by the people living in such places, but it is also common in the northern part of the country since Islamic Religion is the predominant faith being practiced there. According to UNICEF (2018), among the 36 states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, the North-Western States of Zamfara have the greatest proportion of females married by the age of 15-18, with 48.6% and 87.4% in Jigawa, respectively. Despite figures showing a 9 percent fall in the number of child brides since 2003, with a further forecasted decline of 6% in 2030, Nigeria's real number of child brides is

expected to rise by over one million by 2030 and quadruple by 2050 due to the steady rapid birth statistics going on in Nigeria as a nation (UNICEF, 2018).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

According to the findings, GBV is a form of gender discrimination that stems from unequal power relations between men and women, which prevents women from enjoying rights and freedoms on an equal footing with men. The study discovered that Nigerian women have faced discrimination in various economic areas, particularly in the political and social realms, for a long time. They face gender-based violence in the form of family violence, rape, physical assault, abusive language, refusal of food, sex slavery, and early child marriage as they fight for basic human rights. In addition, according to the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), over 31% of women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence before the age of fifteen. Age, job, educational attainment, watching a mother being beaten as a child, family type, duration of union, and participation in household decision-making are all factors that have been identified as contributing to gender-based violence, according to the research. Sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies (which may also be accompanied by health complications), unsafe abortions, physical injuries, immediate psychological reactions such as shock, shame, guilt, and anger; and long-term psychological outcomes such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, lack of sexual pleasure, and fears are among the medical or health effects of gender-based violence, according to the study. Mental instability, gynecological issues, miscarriage, and lasting disability are some of the other health impacts. The study indicates that gender-based violence has a negative impact not only on women and their reproductive health but also on Nigeria's economy and progress.

#### **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

The authors have no known conflicting interests, financial affiliations, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this study. There are no studies with human participants or animals done by any of the writers in this article. Likewise, there is no funding for this research.

#### **Data Availability Statement (DAS)**

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. This research is a conceptual review, and data were generated using secondary sources.

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