



Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Among Forcibly Displaced Populations in Chad: An Analysis of Women's Specific Vulnerabilities

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Abstract

Chad and its neighboring countries are facing a complex humanitarian crisis characterized by massive population displacement due to armed conflicts, intercommunal violence, and climate shocks. In 2023, Chad hosted over one million forcibly displaced persons, including 712,000 refugees and 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). These populations, particularly women and girls, experience GBV at a significantly high rate of approximately 40% affected. Given the fragility of protection mechanisms and cultural barriers, this study addresses the urgent need to understand GBV perceptions in order to design responses tailored to local realities. The research analyzes sociodemographic and geospatial factors that may influence the GBV acceptance among forcibly displaced populations in Chad. By examining the role of migratory status, gender, access to services, and geographic location, the study seeks to capture how GBV is perceived to inform decision-making in future humanitarian interventions. The methodological approach employs a mixed-methods design (quantitative and qualitative). Quantitative analysis is based on a dataset of 5,409 individuals from the 2024 RMS Chad survey. Chi-square tests were applied to assess associations between variables. The qualitative component draws on individual and group interviews conducted with key informants during the same survey. Thematic analysis of interviews helped uncover the underlying cultural and social dimensions. Findings reveal that acceptance of GBV among forcibly displaced persons in Chad is shaped by complex dynamics where migratory status, local integration, and social norms interact. The study also highlights the need for differentiated interventions combining strengthened protection for vulnerable groups with transformation of patriarchal norms, beyond simple material approaches. These results call for rethinking humanitarian strategies in displacement contexts.

Keywords: *Gender-Based Violence; Forcibly Displaced Persons; Chad; Patriarchal Norms*

Introduction

Chad, a landlocked Sahelian country, is facing multidimensional humanitarian crises that trigger massive population displacements. In 2023, the country hosted more than 712,000 refugees (including 222,000 returnees from Sudan) and counted 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to: (1) armed conflicts (notably cross-border incursions from Sudan, CAR, and Nigeria); (2) intercommunal violence (related to ethnic tensions and resource competition); and (3) climate shocks (droughts and floods exacerbating food insecurity) (UNHCR, 2023). These forced displacements deepen socio-economic vulnerabilities, limiting access to fundamental rights (health, education, employment), and increasing risks of gender-based violence (GBV).

Regarding GBV exposure, forcibly displaced women and girls are particularly exposed to sexual violence, forced marriages, and sexual exploitation. Data from the Chad Protection Cluster (2023) indicates that 40% of forcibly displaced women report having experienced some form of violence. Yet, GBV prevention and response mechanisms are weakened by resource shortages, geographical isolation, and cultural barriers (RMS Tchad, 2024). Additionally, local social norms and displacement-related trauma influence GBV acceptance (RMS Tchad, 2024).

These elements underscore the urgent need to grasp the perceptions of studied phenomena with greater nuance. Such an approach will ultimately enable the development of responses better adapted to identified challenges – both more relevant and more effective – by integrating, in their very conception, field realities as well as specific expectations of various involved actors. In this perspective, the present study aims to analyze social representations of gender-based violence among forcibly displaced persons in Chad.

The objective of this study is to examine GBV acceptance among forcibly displaced populations in Chad according to sociodemographic criteria (gender, legal status, access to services) and geospatial criteria (geographical location).

This article is structured in four parts. After a brief overview of factors contributing to gender-based violence (GBV), particularly during conflicts or among forcibly displaced individuals, in the first part, the second presents the methodology and data used, the third presents obtained results, and the fourth focuses on discussing the results.

Overview of Factors Contributing to Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Particularly During Conflicts or Among Forcibly Displaced Individuals

The World Health Organization (2002) defines sexual violence as: “Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality, using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” These are acts that use a person's sexuality coercively, ranging from sexual assault to rape, including sexual harassment and forced marriage. These acts are often motivated by the desire for domination, power, and control over others, **and can have devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for survivors.**

According to Plan International (2025), “gender-based or sexual violence is a form of violence perpetrated against a person because of their gender or sexuality. It manifests through acts, behaviors, or discourse based on inequalities and preconceived gender norms, aimed at exercising power over the victim. It can occur in different contexts: public space, private sphere, school, work, etc. **It causes serious physical, sexual, and psychological suffering**”.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee of the International Organization for Migration (2015) defines gender-based violence as "any harmful act committed against someone's will based on socially established differences between men and women (gender). This includes all acts causing physical, psychological, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty, whether in public or private spheres."

When systematically used to torture, injure, obtain information, degrade, threaten, intimidate, or punish in connection with armed conflict, sexual violence may constitute a method of warfare (CICR, 2004).

Sexual violence perpetrated during conflicts are serious and widespread crimes that primarily affect women and girls (UNHCR, 2000). These violences are often used as weapons of war to terrorize civilian populations, destabilize communities, and destroy social fabric. They are also used to humiliate, punish, and control vulnerable individuals and groups.

Factors sustaining gender-based violence, particularly in contexts of conflicts or among forcibly displaced persons, and preventing survivors from obtaining justice are socio-economic, cultural and societal, political and legislative, individual and psychological (CICR, 2004 ; Josse E., 2006 ; OIM, 2018 ; Jansen N., 2022 ; Plan International, 2025):

- **Poverty and resource scarcity:** Poverty and absence of resources among women make them easy targets for exploitation when they must meet their basic material needs. Certain household tasks generally assumed by women, such as collecting firewood in forests or queuing for food, can put them in danger. Women and girls in poverty situations are more vulnerable to violence as they may be more dependent on men or lack resources to escape violent situations. During conflicts or forced displacements, this vulnerability amplifies further.
- **Patriarchal sociocultural norms, stereotypes, and gender inequalities:** GBV is deeply rooted in gender inequalities, where men often hold disproportionate power in social, economic, and political relationships. Sociocultural norms dictating expected roles for men and women can justify violence as a means to maintain these roles. Similarly, stereotypes about masculinity and femininity can encourage violent behaviors and justify discriminatory attitudes. Thus, violence against women, already tacitly tolerated in many societies during peacetime, increases during conflicts. In most African societies, sexually assaulted persons are judged guilty of acts perpetrated against them. Therefore, they remain silent to avoid social rejection, forced marriage to their aggressor, incarceration, or even mistreatment or murder. Furthermore, in many cultures, women are considered symbolic representatives of their caste, ethnicity, or national identity. This tendency often intensifies with conflict outbreak. Therefore, an attack against a woman is considered an attack against the entire community she belongs to. Defiling a woman is seen as a way to demoralize men around her or send them an intimidation message. In other words, when actual combatants are out of reach, sexual violence, particularly against women, is a means of attacking the adversary's community. It's also noted that acts considered sexual violence by the international community are not culturally perceived as such. Therefore, women don't file complaints because they don't recognize certain practices as assaults.
- **Political under-representation and lack of access to Justice:** Women's under-representation in political decision-making bodies limits their capacity to defend their rights and influence anti-GBV policies. Furthermore, perpetrator impunity and lack of victim support can worsen the problem. Perpetrator impunity means many victims hesitate to report sexual violence they've experienced to police, family, or others because they fear retaliation from aggressors, particularly

when they know their aggressor or when it involves an influential person such as a military member, administrative authority, etc.

- **Humanitarian crises and emergency situations** : Certain war ideologies incite rape. Widespread sexual violence can be used as a warfare method to forcibly displace people and destroy communities. During conflicts, the general collapse of public order leads to increased violence in all forms. Value systems, social structures, and judicial mechanisms decompose following prolonged conflict. Carrying weapons provides opportunity to coerce others. In a context of small arms and light weapons proliferation, women are generally unarmed, reducing their ability to resist. Loss of traditional masculine roles among displaced persons and refugees can result in increased violence directed against women. Alcohol abuse, when intensifying, only worsens the situation. During armed conflicts, women often find themselves unaccompanied and consequently exposed to sexual violence when men from their families (who ordinarily form part of the social network protecting them) have fled the region, are detained, missing, or engaged in hostilities.
- **Previous violence experiences**: Individuals who have been victims or witnesses of violence in their past (childhood or previous relationships) are more likely to reproduce violence patterns. Thus, through socialization and education, how children are raised and educated (including messages conveyed by family, school, and media) can reinforce gender stereotypes and violence acceptance. Furthermore, generalized and/or organized violence during conflict has long-term repercussions. This is the acquired violence process. It involves modification of mental representations of violence (at individual and societal levels) subsequent to experiencing generalized violence. This change in violence perception leads to increased permissiveness toward violent behaviors.

Methodology

The basic hypothesis of this study is as follow: perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) among forcibly displaced persons are influenced by sociodemographic and geospatial characteristics as well as sociocultural context (patriarchal sociocultural norms).

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component relies on secondary data from the RMS (Results Monitoring Surveys) Chad survey conducted in 2024, with a sample of 5,409 individuals questioned about domestic violence acceptance. Table 1 presents the distribution of UNHCR intervention localities selected for the study by sub-office and UNHCR sub-delegation.

Independent variables include residence status (refugee, IDP), sex, nationality, access to services, and geographical area, while the dependent variable is domestic violence acceptance. Descriptive analysis using cross-tabulations was performed, and Chi-square (χ^2) tests were employed to evaluate associations between categorical independent variables and the dependent variable, with significance threshold set at 5%.

The qualitative phase complemented quantitative analyses with 38 individual interviews and 38 focus group discussions (FGDs). Table 2 presents the distribution of individual interviews and group discussions by collection zone. Thematic content analysis explored underlying mechanisms of quantitative results, particularly cultural justifications for violence and victim coping strategies. Qualitative data were coded to identify recurring patterns, such as patriarchal norms impact or humanitarian aid-related tensions. Integration of both methods strengthened conclusion validity by cross-referencing statistical trends with participant narratives.

Study Results

Analysis results (Table 3) reveal a significant association between forcibly displaced persons' status and their acceptance of domestic violence against women. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are markedly more inclined to accept this violence (43.2%) than refugees or asylum seekers (34.3%). This difference suggests that IDPs, while better integrated locally, remain more influenced by traditional social norms legitimizing domestic violence, while refugees, often exposed to awareness programs in camps, more frequently reject these practices. This trend is explained by strong community ties that reinforce traditional patriarchal norms, as shown in an interview where marital conflicts arise around financial aid management:

" When the man takes [the money], he drinks alcohol with it, he finishes everything; but the woman, it's intended for her small business ".

IDPs, often integrated into rigid local social structures, thus perpetuate violence tolerance, while refugees, more exposed to international interventions (UNHCR, NGOs), seem less influenced by these dynamics. Discussion also highlights that differentiated resource access and women's economic dependence exacerbate these violences among IDPs, where masculine authority remains dominant.

Legal access to Chadian territory also plays a determining role in domestic violence acceptance. Individuals who entered illegally (46.1%) are significantly more likely to tolerate it than those who entered legally (30.5%). This result can be explained by increased precarity of migrants in irregular situations, who, fearing authorities or lacking access to protection services, are less inclined to question power dynamics within their households. Qualitative interviews confirm this trend, with testimonies evoking fear of retaliation or expulsion in case of denunciation.

Indeed, interviews reveal that migrants in irregular situations, often excluded from formal protection systems and facing extreme economic precarity, develop survival mechanisms that include violence normalization, perceived as inevitable reality. A respondent affirms:

"Undocumented persons have no choice: they must accept everything to avoid attracting authorities' attention".

This reflects resignation to abuse. Discussion also points to lack of access to support networks (NGOs, UNHCR) for these populations, limiting their exposure to alternative norms and reinforcing their isolation. Finally, fear of retaliation and expulsion often dissuades victims from reporting violence, perpetuating a cycle of impunity and passive acceptance. These elements illustrate how illegal migration status aggravates violence tolerance due to a combination of precarity, institutional mistrust, and absence of recourse.

Finally, analysis highlights marked geographical and socio-economic disparities. Areas of BO N'DJAMENA (45.9%) and SO BAGASOLA (42.3%) present the highest acceptance rates, contrary to SO ABEICHE (33.1%) and SO GORE (36.2%). Furthermore, access to decent work is paradoxically associated with greater violence tolerance (38.5% versus 34.5% for unemployed).

Group discussions reveal this trend could reflect tensions related to resource redistribution within households, where women's financial autonomy is sometimes perceived as a threat by their spouses. Conversely, healthcare access shows no significant correlation ($p = 0.128$), indicating this factor less influences domestic violence perceptions. This variation is explained by distinct socio-cultural contexts: high-acceptance zones often correspond to urban environments (N'Djamena) or border areas (Bagasola) marked by greater instability and more entrenched patriarchal norms. Paradoxically, access to decent work is associated with greater violence tolerance (38.5% versus 34.5% for unemployed). Similarly,

contrary to expectations, though not significantly, women are more inclined to tolerate violence than men (37.3% versus 33.6%). Qualitative interviews suggest this counter-intuitive correlation could be explained by increased tensions around resources in households where stable income exists, as testified by a respondent:

" When the man works, he believes he has the right to control everything that enters the house ".

These results highlight the complexity of factors influencing violence perceptions, where economic development alone is insufficient to modify traditional gender relations.

Discussion

This study's results reveal complex dynamics in domestic violence acceptance among forcibly displaced populations in Chad, highlighting subtle interactions between migration status, territorial anchoring, and socio-economic conditions. The significant divergence between IDPs (43.2%) and refugees (34.3%) suggests a remarkable paradox: better local integration doesn't necessarily guarantee emancipation from patriarchal norms. On the contrary, IDPs' community rootedness seems to crystallize traditional male domination structures, while institutional supervision in refugee camps would favor certain critical distancing from these practices. This finding demonstrates differential effectiveness of acculturation mechanisms according to displacement type.

Migration status presents itself as a determining vulnerability marker, with increased acceptance of 15.6 points among illegal entrants. This phenomenon fits what Agamben (1998) would qualify as "bare life" - an existence reduced to survival where claiming fundamental rights becomes unthinkable. Expressed resignation ("they must accept everything") translates profound internalization of precarity as existential condition, where violence normalizes as invisible tax paid for invisibility.

The geography of mentalities, revealed by regional disparities, confirms heterogeneity of gender social constructions. The 12.8-point gap between BO N'DJAMENA and SO ABECHÉ probably reflects erosion of traditional solidarities in urban environments, compensated by exacerbated marital power relations. The decent employment paradox - supposedly an emancipation factor but associated here with greater violence tolerance - could be interpreted through relative resources theory: male employment access would reinforce patriarchal power by legitimizing control over family resources, while employment absence would create vulnerability balance.

These results call for rethinking humanitarian interventions: while basic service access remains necessary, it appears insufficient to transform gender relations. A differentiated approach is required, combining deep work on social norms with targeted reinforcement of protection mechanisms for doubly vulnerable populations (irregular migrants, women in urban environments). The challenge lies in the capacity to surpass assistance logic to build spaces for negotiating gendered identities, particularly in high human mobility contexts.

Conclusion

This study illuminates complex dynamics underlying gender-based violence acceptance among displaced populations in Chad, revealing significant paradoxes in relationships between local integration, migration status, and social norms. Results demonstrate that internally displaced persons (IDPs), while better integrated in their host communities, manifest increased tolerance to domestic violence (43.2%) compared to refugees (34.3%), thus highlighting persistent influence of traditional patriarchal structures

despite local rootedness. Conversely, refugees, though more legally vulnerable, benefit more from international interventions that seem to attenuate acceptance of these violences.

Analysis also reveals that illegal migration status constitutes an aggravating factor, with 46.1% of irregular migrants tolerating domestic violence versus 30.5% of legal entrants. This disparity reflects an alarming reality where legal and economic precarity generates forced resignation to abuse, as evidenced by qualitative narratives. Geographical disparities, notably high acceptance rates in N'Djamena (45.9%) and Bagasola (42.3%), confirm heterogeneity of gender social constructions, influenced by unstable urban and border contexts.

The decent employment paradox, associated with greater violence tolerance (38.5%), questions the hypothesis that economic autonomy suffices to transform gender relations. These results rather suggest that humanitarian interventions must surpass purely material approaches to address deeply rooted sociocultural norms.

In conclusion, this study advocates for a multidimensional response to GBV in displacement contexts, integrating both reinforced protection mechanisms for vulnerable populations (irregular migrants, women in urban environments) and social transformation programs specifically targeting patriarchal norms. The fundamental challenge lies in creating dialogue and negotiation spaces for gendered identities, essential for breaking the cycle of violence and impunity in these communities experiencing extreme precarity. Public policies and humanitarian interventions would thus benefit from adopting a differentiated approach, adapted to complex realities highlighted by this research.

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Appendices

Table 1 : Distribution of priority unhcr intervention localities selected for study by sub-office and unhcr sub-delegation

Sub-delegation	UNHCR Sub-office	Localities
SO ABECHÉ	FO FARCHANA	Farchana, Gaga, Metche, Aboutengué, Abéché, Alacha, Dougui.
	FU Hadjer Had	Bredjing, Treguine, Arkoum
	FO Goz Beida	Goz Amir, Zabout, Djabal
	FO Iriba	Touloum, Am Nabak, Iridimi
	FO Guéréda	Kounoungou et Oure Cassoni
SO GORE		Villages Moy.char; Belom; Dossoeye; Doholo; Amboko; Gonje; Villages L. Or; Moissala
SO BAGASOLA		Bol; Dar es salam
BO N'DJAMENA		N'djamena; Chari-Baguimi; Mayo-Kebbi Est

Table 2 : Distribution of individual interviews and group discussions conducted

Collection Zone	Number of Interviews	Number of FGDs
N'Djamena	06 interviews	06 FGDs
Lake (Bol and Bagassola)	10 interviews	07 FGDs
South (Oriental et Occidental)	10 interviews	11 FGDs
East 1: (Abéché/Farchana) Ouaddai (Adré)	08 interviews	08 FGDs
East 2 : (Goz Beida/Touloum/Am Nabak)	06 interviews	06 FGDs
Total	38 interviews	39 GDs

Table 3 : Gender-based violence (gbv) acceptance according to some sociodemographic variables and geographical location

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Modalities</i>	<i>Violence acceptance against women</i>		<i>Chi-square Test</i>
		Does not accept	accept	
<i>Status</i>	IDP	56,8%	43,2%	0,000
	Refugees/Asylum seekers	65,7%	34,3%	
<i>Legal entry to Chad</i>	No	53,9%	46,1%	0,000
	Yes	69,5%	30,5%	
<i>Right to decent work</i>	No	65,6%	34,5%	0,004
	Yes	61,5%	38,5%	
<i>Healthcare access</i>	No	59,7%	40,3%	0,128
	Yes	64,5%	35,5%	
<i>Zone</i>	BO N'DJAMENA	54,1%	45,9%	0,000
	SO ABEICHE	66,9%	33,1%	
	SO BAGASOLA	57,7%	42,3%	
	SO GORE	63,8%	36,2%	
<i>Individual's sex</i>	Female	62,7%	37,3%	0,005
	Male	66,4%	33,6%	
<i>Individual's nationality</i>	Cameroun	49,5%	50,5%	0,001
	Niger	90,0%	10,0%	
	Nigeria	71,6%	28,4%	
	CAR	62,6%	37,4%	
	Sudan	67,3%	32,7%	
	South Sudan	72,2%	27,8%	
<i>Total</i>		64,3%	35,7%	
<i>Sample size</i>		3477	1932	

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