



Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response: **What Has Changed?**



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Abia State

God's Own State



Abia State

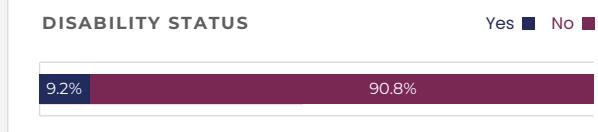
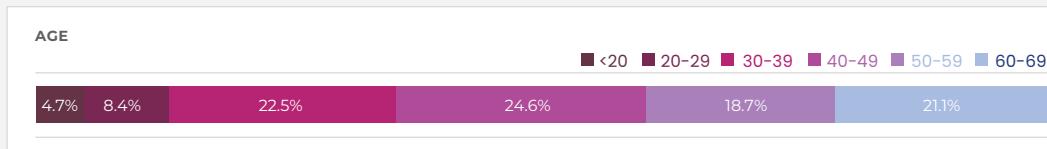
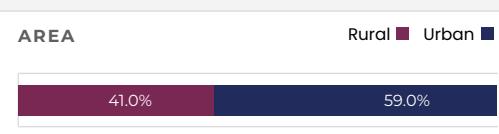
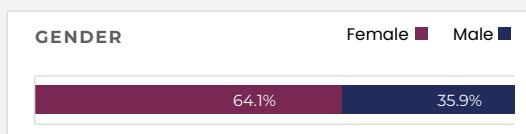
Population: 4,626,019

51% Female 49% Male

Overall Grade

52.9

Respondents Demography (n = 1,101)



Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

BUDGET ALLOCATION

₦420.01m

(This accounts for 0.2% of the total state budget)

BUDGET PERFORMANCE

₦207.73m

(This accounts for 49.5% of total allocation to the ministry)

49.5%



Per Capita Spending

₦88.8

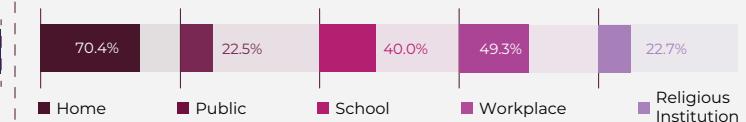
Indexes	Indicators			Total Grades
Laws and Policies	LP ₁	LP ₂	LP ₃	—
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ ₁	ALJ ₂	ALJ ₃	ALJ ₄
Support Services	SS ₁	SS ₂	SS ₃	SS ₄
Information and Awareness	IA ₁	IA ₂	IA ₃	IA ₄
Budget and Spending	BS ₁	BS ₂	BS ₃	—

GBV Context 2025

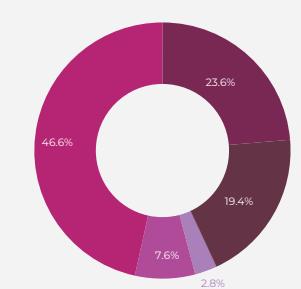
Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



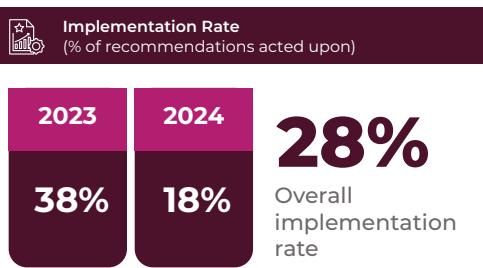
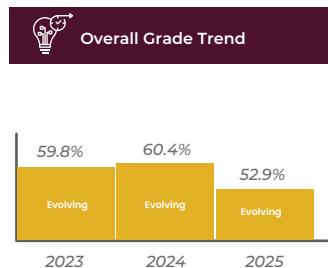
What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



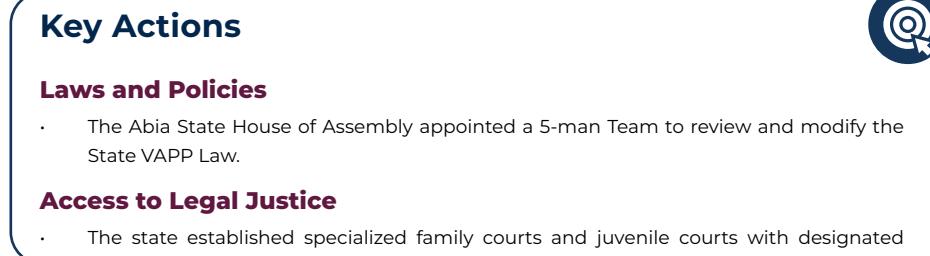
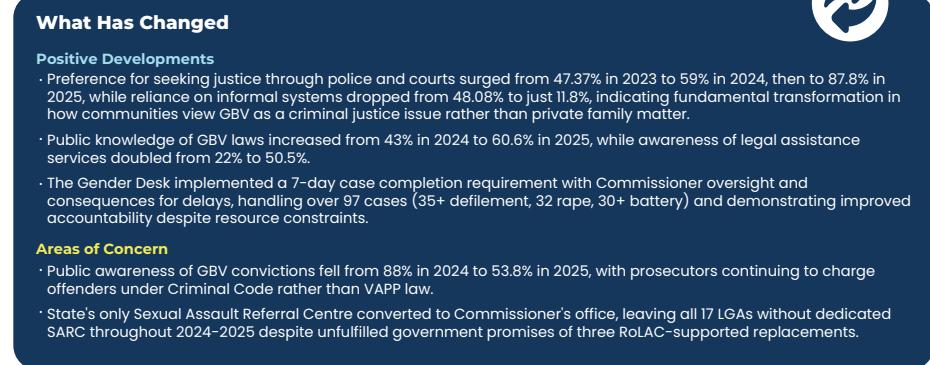
Family/relatives
Police/law enforcement authority
Friends/neighbors
Traditional/community leader or group

Religious leader (Pastor, Ulama, Imam, Deity)
I did not seek help
Employer/Work colleague/Labour group
Lawyer

Financial constraint
Perception that they could help
Proximity or accessibility
Services
Trust



Index	2023	2024	2025
Laws and Policies	LP 90.0%	-1 ▼ LP 66.7%	-1 ▼ LP 58.3%
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ 61.3%	ALJ 62.5%	ALJ 56.3%
Support Services	SS 61.3%	-1 ▼ SS 43.8%	SS 43.8%
Information and Awareness	IA 61.3%	IA 62.5%	IA 56.3%
Budget and Spending	BS 25.0%	+2 ▲ BS 66.7%	-1 ▼ BS 50.0%



magistrates and judges to handle GBV cases across the judicial system.

The Police Commissioner implemented a seven-day turnaround policy for GBV investigations, requiring officers to document, investigate, and complete cases within one week or face queries.

Support Services

- The state established specialized family courts and juvenile courts with designated magistrates and judges to handle GBV cases across the judicial system.
- The Police Commissioner implemented a seven-day turnaround policy for GBV investigations, requiring officers to document, investigate, and complete cases within one week or face queries.

Information and Awareness

- The Ministry of Women Affairs deployed GBV desk officers across all 17 local government areas to coordinate sensitization and response activities at the grassroots level.
- The state has commenced translating the VAPP law into Pidgin English and Igbo language to enhance accessibility and understanding among indigent communities.

Change Spotlight

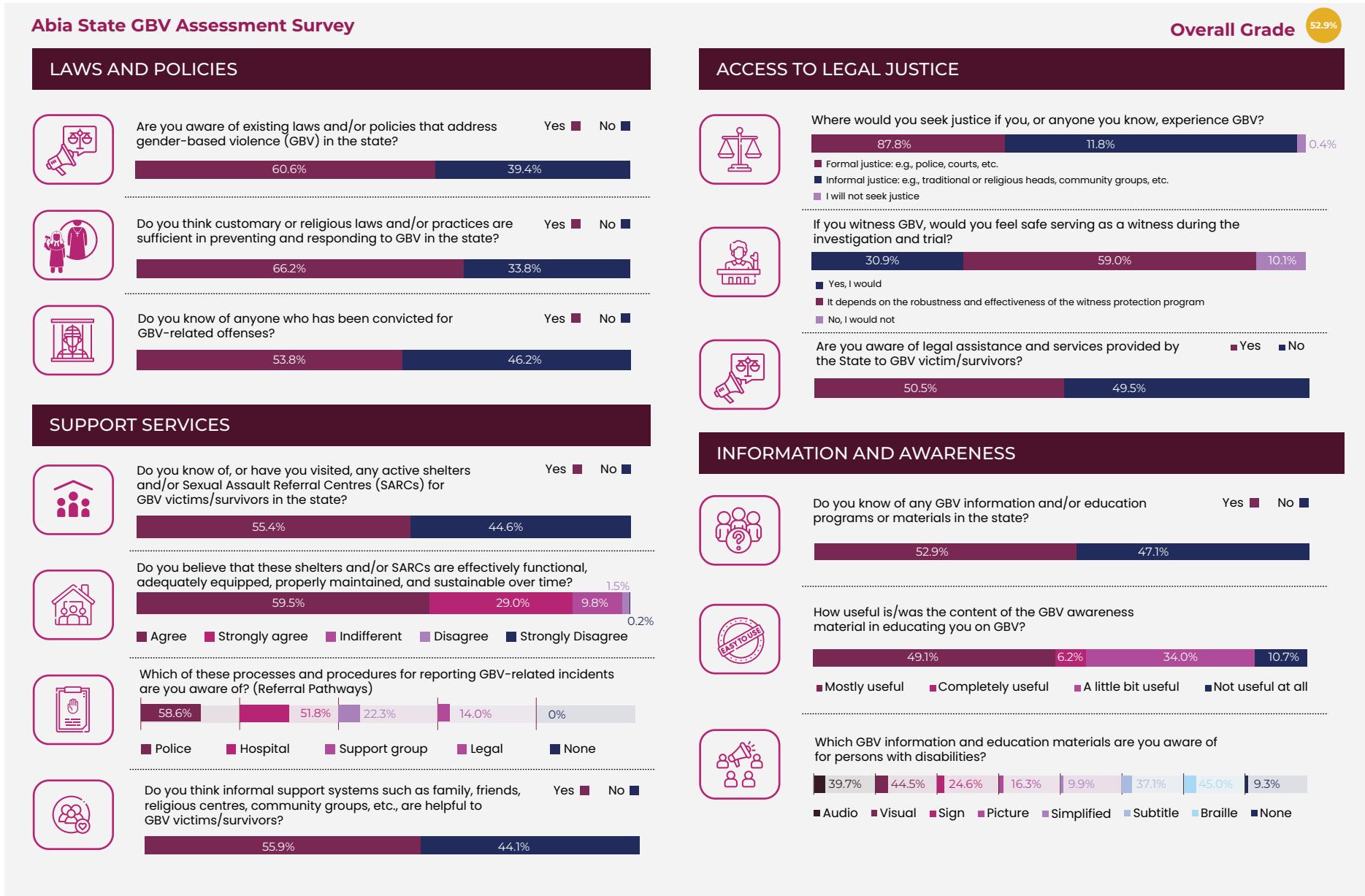
Abia State's most significant achievement was behavioural change at the community level with increased preference for seeking justice through formal channels (police and courts) while reliance on informal systems declined drastically. This represents a fundamental transformation in how citizens view GBV, from a private family matter to a criminal justice issue requiring state intervention.

This attitudinal shift was supported by tangible improvements in police responsiveness. The Gender Desk described as "GBV-friendly," implemented a strict seven-day case completion including documentation, investigation, and rounding off the process within seven days with consequences for delays. The desk handled over 97 cases in 2024 (35+ defilement, 32 rape, 30+ battery cases), demonstrating active engagement despite resource constraints.

The Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) emerged as the state's most consistent survivor support infrastructure, providing accessible care across all 17 local government areas. Health workers conducted weekly community sensitization programs, meeting with village elders to announce services and educate residents about GBV. Treatment was provided at nominal cost ("little or nothing"). As the PHC officer explained: "We don't just treat them, we talk to them... bring them up and make them know that when you are doing something, it adds value to your life." The Governor's administration supported this through facility facelifts and empowerment programs for survivors aged 16-35.

Civil society organizations maintained critical frontline services despite severe funding challenges. CEHRAWS continued frontline services including petition writing, police liaison, and direct financial assistance to survivors, often from staff personal funds.





Abia State GBV Context Trend (2024-2025)

Overall Grade 52.9%

Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



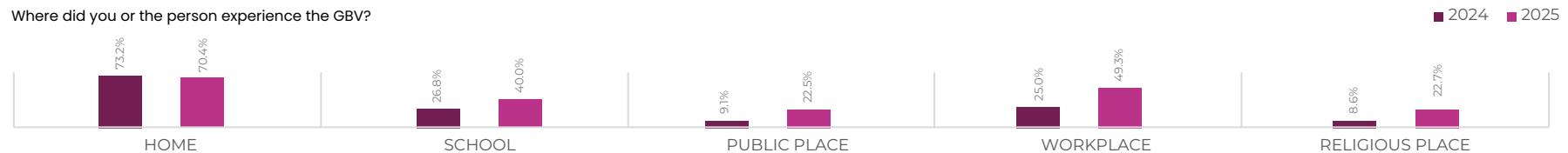
51.6%

of Abia State population have either experienced GBV or knows someone who have experienced GBV

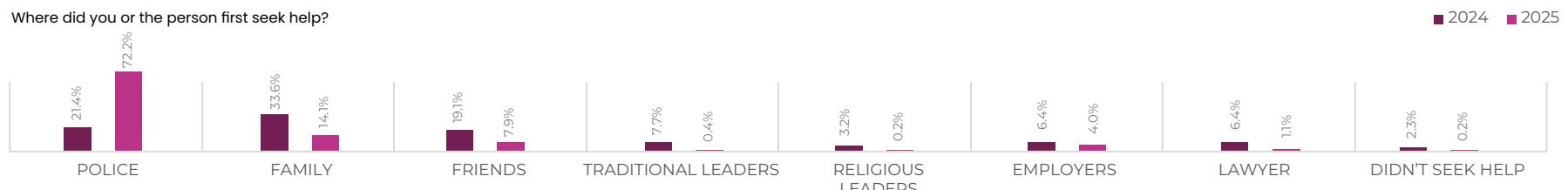
What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



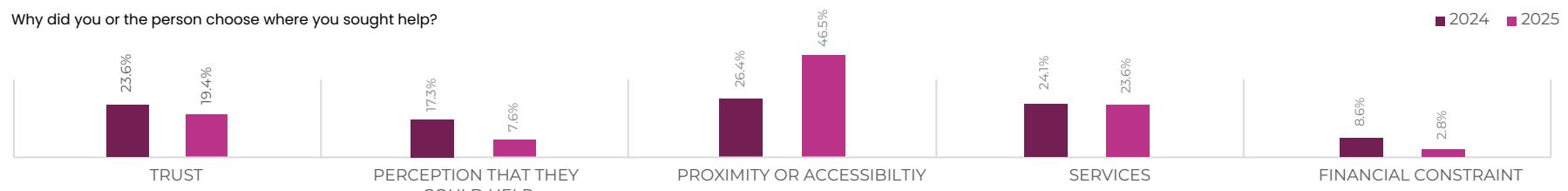
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Where did you or the person first seek help?



Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



State Data Trend (2023-2025)

Overall Grade 52.9%





KEY INSIGHTS

Laws and Policies

Current State in 2025

Abia State domesticated the VAPP law in 2020, establishing a comprehensive legal framework that mirrors the federal VAPP Act of 2015. The law also provides for protection orders, survivor-centred procedures, medical and psychosocial referrals, compensation, and restitution. The State House of Assembly initiated a review process to harmonize criminal laws, aiming to eliminate sentencing disparities between VAPP law, Child Rights Act, and the Criminal Code. However, progress remained slow as of mid-2025. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Justice undertook an innovative accessibility initiative, translating the VAPP law into Pidgin English and Igbo language "where it can be accessible and everyone will understand their rights as contained in the law."

The 2025 Womanity Index survey data shows that public awareness of GBV laws in Abia State stands at 60.6%, showing recovery from the sharp decline to 43% in 2024, though still below the 82.2% recorded in 2023. Among those aware, 77.1% believe formal laws and policies are effective and sufficient in preventing and responding to GBV. Additionally, 58.9% of respondents are aware of customary and religious laws addressing GBV, with 66.2% believing these mechanisms help prevent and respond to violence, a dramatic increase from 20.39% in 2023 and 26% in 2024.

However, a critical implementation challenge undermines the law's effectiveness. A key officer at the Abia State's office of the National Human Rights Commission revealed that "the law enforcement agencies, that is the police, the Attorney General, the DPP – they have made the VAPP law optional. They now pick and choose under which law to charge, rather going to charge the person under the Criminal Code, which has lesser punishment for violence against women." This selective application means perpetrators of identical offenses receive vastly different sentences. During a prison visit, the coordinator observed "one is life imprisonment, another is 14-years imprisonment, and another is three years imprisonment" for rape cases, depending on whether prosecutors charged offenders under VAPP law or the Criminal Code.

Awareness of GBV convictions stands at 53.8%, a significant decline from 88% in 2024. The Legal Aid Coordinator explained that charges are often drafted by police and the Director of Public Prosecution, not judges, stating: "The judges do not prepare charges... whatever charge you bring to the judge, the judge will look at it, hear the evidence before it, and make a decision based on

the charge." This places responsibility for appropriate charging squarely on law enforcement and prosecutorial discretion.

Harmful customary and religious practices persist despite legal prohibitions. The Legal Aid Coordinator confirmed: "There are harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and widowhood rites. Those things are still prevalent in some remote areas." CEHRAWS documented a case in which "community met and decided that this woman did wrong. They never took her to police, didn't take her to court. They decided to ostracize her. Break into her house, pack her things out, and throw her out. After beating her up for using 'omu nkwu' (palm fronds) as a traditional warning sign on disputed property." The Executive Director explained that "in Igbo land, they say that a woman does not have right to do that," illustrating how customary norms directly contradict statutory protections for women's rights.

Changes Over Time (2023-2025)

Public awareness of GBV laws demonstrated volatility, dropping from 82.2% in 2023 to 43% in 2024, before recovering to 60.6% in 2025. This suggests awareness campaigns may be sporadic rather than sustained. Conversely, belief in the effectiveness of customary and religious mechanisms surged from 20.4% in 2023 to 26% in 2024 and then dramatically to 66.2% in 2025, indicating a concerning shift toward informal justice systems that often prioritize reconciliation over accountability.

The most significant regression occurred in conviction awareness. After reaching 88% in 2024, awareness fell to 53.8% in 2025. Stakeholders confirmed this trend is linked to systematic challenges in the justice system. The National Human Rights Commission documented how pressure from churches, traditional rulers, and community members forces victims to withdraw cases. As the coordinator stated: "the victim becomes the suspect... she has refused to forgive... she is now turned to be the wicked person... then the person that attempted to kill her becomes the nice person, because he has apologized."

Access to Legal Justice

Current State in 2025

Access to formal justice mechanisms shows strong public preference, with 87.8% of respondents indicating they would seek justice through police or courts if they or someone they know experienced GBV. This represents substantial growth from 47.4% in 2023 and 59% in 2024, suggesting increasing trust in formal institutions. However, 11.8% still prefer informal justice mechanisms, while only 0.4%

stated they would not seek justice at all.

Awareness of legal assistance services stands at 50.5%, representing significant improvement from 22% in 2024, though baseline data from 2023 was unavailable. The Ministry of Justice confirmed that law officers are stationed in courts across all 17 local government areas, providing legal representation and prosecution services. The Gender Desk Officer explained: "We interview the person... help the person to go to the Police and make a report because investigations has to be carried out... after the investigation, the police come back to the Ministry with the case file and then we take it to court for prosecution."

Legal Aid Council maintains only one physical office in Umuahia, creating access barriers for residents in other areas, particularly Aba. However, the state has established specialized GBV infrastructure including family courts and juvenile courts with designated magistrates and judges. Family Support Units are also present in all police divisions. Despite these efforts, witness protection remains a concern: 59% of respondents said their willingness to testify depends on the strength of protection programs, while 30.9% would feel safe serving as witnesses, and 10.1% would not.

Informal justice mechanisms continue to obstruct formal processes with about 53.2% of respondents who believe that informal justice systems help ensure GBV victims/survivors get justice, indicating persistent community reliance on non-state mechanisms. The National Human Rights Commission observed: "Somebody assault a woman, almost killed her and when she is recovering, all the churches will come in preaching forgiveness and leave it to God... even traditional rulers, women meeting, entire community, including political office holders will step into it to force the woman to accept the apology."

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Preference for formal justice mechanisms increased substantially from 47.4% in 2023 to 59% in 2024, reaching 87.8% in 2025, demonstrating growing confidence in state institutions. Conversely, reliance on informal justice declined from 48.1% in 2023 to 40% in 2024, then drastically to 11.8% in 2025, indicating meaningful behavioural shifts in justice-seeking.

Awareness of legal assistance services jumped dramatically from 22% in 2024 to 50.5% in 2025, signifying improved information dissemination. However, this increase occurred despite the Legal Aid Council's continued resource constraints and limited physical presence, suggesting other actors, particularly the Ministry of Justice and civil society organizations, filled information gaps.

Witness protection concerns intensified, with 59% of 2025 respondents conditioning their cooperation on protection program effectiveness, compared to 35% in 2024 and 46.1% in 2023. This heightened concern coincides with documented cases of police-level intimidation, suggesting survivors and potential witnesses increasingly recognize safety risks within the justice process itself.

Support Services

Current State in 2025

There is no functional SARC in Abia State. A Director at the Ministry of Women Affairs stated:

"Presently, we don't have one yet, but about three are in the making with the help of RoLAC... one is already ongoing at Aba, presently." The National Human Rights Commission confirmed: "I am not aware of any" operational SARC, adding that when she inquired in March 2025, the Permanent Secretary indicated "they are still working on it... means that they don't have it in place for the mean time." However, the Ministry of Justice confirmed three SARCs are under construction through RoLAC's partnership. Regarding shelters, the only temporal shelter owned by the state is the Half Way Home located within the premises of the Ministry of Women Affairs.

Despite this lack of a SARC, multiple GBV reporting and support channels exist in the state, including the Ministry of Women Affairs, police divisions, LGA social welfare units, and the media. However, these services remain fragmented and under-resourced, with uneven awareness of referral pathways. Police or community security pathways are known to 58.6% of respondents, down from 95.2% in 2024 but higher than 56% in 2023. Healthcare facility pathways are recognized by 51.8%, up from 18.2% in 2024 and 6% in 2023. However, awareness of legal representation pathways declined sharply to 14.9% from 38.1% in 2024, while support group pathways dropped to 22.3% from 71.9% in 2024.

To improve access, stakeholders report that hotlines for GBV reporting have been created and will be officially launched during this year's 16 Days of Activism. Staff training on the hotline system was completed in August 2025, laying the groundwork for more coordinated and accessible survivor support.

The Centre for Gender, Youth, and Child Development at Michael Okpara University provides counselling and limited support to students and surrounding communities and CEHRAWS manages cases through mediation and referrals but lacks resources for comprehensive support.

Regarding informal support systems, 55.9% of respondents believe family, friends, religious centres, and community groups are helpful to GBV survivors, down from 80.9% in 2023 and 45% in 2024. However, qualitative evidence contradicts this perception. The National Human Rights Commission documented how religious and traditional leaders pressure survivors to accept apologies and withdraw cases.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Support service infrastructure in Abia State experienced significant regression in 2025 as multiple stakeholders confirmed that the SARC that was established during the previous administration was repurposed for administrative use, with the Commissioner's office now occupying the space originally designated for survivor support services. However, the state continues to implement robust public sensitization campaigns about planned SARCs, creating awareness of the concept without corresponding service availability. This resulted in high increase of SARC/shelter awareness from 11.8% in 2023 to 55.4% in 2025, despite the absence of operational facilities. This paradox likely reflects heightened public discourse about the need for survivor services combined with government announcements.

Referral pathway awareness patterns show concerning instability. Police pathway awareness increased from 56% in 2023 to 95.2% in 2024, unfortunately if decreased to 58.6% in 2025, while healthcare pathway awareness increased from 6% in 2023 to 18.2% in 2024 and 51.8% in 2025. Legal

representation pathway awareness showed an increase from 28% to 38.1% in 2024, but a collapse to 14.9% in 2025, and support group pathway awareness showed a spontaneous increase from 8% in 2023 to 71.9% in 2024 but dropped sharply to 22.3% in 2025. These fluctuations suggest inconsistent messaging and lack of sustained coordination among service providers.

Most significantly, trust in informal support systems declined dramatically from 80.92% in 2023 to 45% in 2024, reaching 55.9% in 2025. This volatile pattern indicates communities are reassessing traditional support mechanisms, though qualitative evidence suggests this reassessment stems from recognition of how informal systems often perpetuate victim-blaming rather than from improved formal service availability.

Information and Awareness

Current State in 2025

Abia State demonstrates moderate reach as awareness of GBV information and awareness programs stands at 52.9%, down from 77.6% in 2023 and 63% in 2024. Among those aware, only 6.2% found materials "completely useful," down from 13.8% in 2023 and 9% in 2024. However, 49.1% found materials "mostly useful" and 34% found them "a little bit useful," indicating materials reach audiences but may lack depth or relevance. Many stakeholders confirmed the use of multiple dissemination channels including the use of handbills during the 16 days of activism, conducting free sensitization, and grassroots engagement.

However, radio remains the primary information source for those aware of GBV laws (72.7%), support services (73.2%), and awareness programs (80.8%). Television reaches 45.4% across different information categories, while social media reaches approximately 49.3% of aware respondents. Traditional channels like newspapers (19.9%), schools (6.1%), healthcare facilities (1.6%), NGOs (6%), traditional leaders (1.2%), religious centres (1%), and workplaces (1%) show minimal penetration. The Ministry of Justice initiated an innovative accessibility project, translating the VAPP law into Pidgin English and Igbo language.

In the education sector, institution-based GBV campaigns have made meaningful progress with regular campaigns within academic and host community of the University by Centre for Gender, Youth, and Child Development. Public support for integrating GBV and child sexual abuse education into schools stands at 87.7%, showing strong demand for institutional prevention efforts. However, systematic curriculum integration remains absent.

While all statewide GBV campaigns and programs now include sign language interpretation, overall accessibility for persons with disabilities remains critically limited. Awareness of disability-inclusive materials shows severe gaps: audio/spoken content (39.7%), braille (45%), visual content (44.5%), screen subtitling (37.1%), sign interpretation (24.6%), picture-based messages (16.3%), and simplified messages (9.9%). These figures represent some improvement from 2023 baseline data but indicate that vast majority of GBV information remains inaccessible to persons with disabilities.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Awareness of GBV programs and materials declined consistently from 77.6% in 2023 to 63% in 2024,

reaching 52.9% in 2025. This erosion suggests awareness campaigns may have lost intensity, reach, or effectiveness over time. Simultaneously, perceived usefulness among those exposed showed dramatic decline, with "completely useful" ratings dropping from 13.8% in 2023 to 9% in 2024, then plummeting to 6.2% in 2025. This pattern indicates materials may not adequately address survivor needs or community questions, or that repetitive messaging without substantive service improvements creates disillusionment.

Disability-inclusive awareness showed mixed but generally disappointing patterns. After a temporary spike in 2024 when visual content awareness reached 84.4%, all formats collapsed in 2025. Audio/spoken content awareness rose from 26% in 2023 to 39.7% in 2025, braille awareness was 45% in 2025, and visual content reached 44.5%. However, these gains pale against the need for universal accessibility across all communication channels.

Budget and Spending

Budget Analysis 2024

Abia State allocated ₦770 million to GBV programs in 2024, representing 0.46% of its total state budget. Of the allocated amount, only ₦207.7 million was actually spent, achieving a 27% implementation rate. This means nearly three-quarters of the budgeted resources remained unutilized by the end of the fiscal year. The actual GBV expenditure constituted 0.45% of the state's total spending, mirroring the budget allocation share. On a per capita basis, Abia State spent approximately ₦88.82 per female resident on GBV-related programs.

Changes Over Time (2022–2024)

Across the last three budget cycles, Abia State has consistently included GBV-specific line items in its annual budget. In 2022, the state allocated ₦2 million for "COVID-19 Sensitization and Advocacy on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Abuses" across the three senatorial districts. This allocation was over-executed at 300%, with an actual spend of ₦6 million. The same line item appeared in the 2023 budget with an allocation of ₦5 million and was fully executed at 100%. In 2024, the state introduced a major entry under the Ministry of Justice for the "Establishment of Five Mobile Court Units," which received an allocation of ₦350 million. Additional GBV-related line items under the Ministry of Women Affairs brought the total GBV allocation for the year to ₦694.50 million.

Despite this provision, actual implementation amounted to only ₦17.28 million, representing 29.8%. When assessed across all relevant MDAs, Abia State performed poorly in budget spending, as the state's GBV budget performance declined sharply from 79.0% in 2023 to 27.0% in 2024, placing it in the struggling (red) category. Per capita spending stood at ₦88.82 in 2024, ₦333.27 in 2023, and ₦93.75 in 2022. Although the 2023 figure reflects a significant spike, the sharp decline in 2024 highlights inconsistent investment and limited continuity in funding for GBV-related interventions.

Human Angle Stories

Madam Gift Uche was thrown out of her matrimonial home along with her five children. A victim of physical violence from her husband, she endured for a long time because of stigma and lack of access to information on the support systems that existed in the state. Madam Uche had to tackle her problems on her own, afraid to speak up because of the trauma of stigmatization that many women in her community have faced for leaving an abusive marriage.

KEY GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Index	Key Gaps	Recommendations	Index	Key Gaps	Recommendations
 Laws and Policies	VAPP law exists but law enforcement agencies selectively apply Criminal Code provisions with lesser penalties, creating vast sentencing disparities.	Mandate that all GBV-related offenses must be charged under VAPP law provisions with quarterly reporting on compliance.	 Information and Awareness	Awareness of GBV programs declined from 77.6% in 2023 to 52.9% in 2025, with perceived usefulness dropping sharply to 6.2% rating materials "completely useful."	Consistently carry out GBV awareness programs, including in remote areas. Conduct formative research to assess what information survivors and communities need versus what is currently provided. Redesign awareness materials based on findings.
	Public awareness of convictions dropped from 88% in 2024 to 53.8% in 2025, suggesting reduced prosecution visibility.	Establish a public Sex Offenders Register accessible online and at courthouses, documenting all GBV convictions with case details (anonymizing survivors) to increase transparency and deterrence.		There is 87.7% public support for school-based GBV education, but no systematic curriculum integration has occurred.	Partner with the Federal Ministry of Education and NERDC to integrate age-appropriate GBV and consent education into primary and secondary school curricula statewide. Train teachers as GBV champions. Establish reporting mechanisms in schools connected to formal GBV response structures.
	Harmful customary practices including widowhood rights violations and community-imposed sanctions on women persist despite legal prohibitions.	Create a Traditional Leaders' Code of Conduct requiring reporting of GBV cases to formal authorities within 48 hours. Establish sanctions for traditional rulers who pressure survivors to withdraw cases or conduct harmful practices.		Only 39.7% of GBV information available in audio, 45% in braille, 44.5% in visual formats, indicating severe disability exclusion.	Produce all GBV awareness materials in accessible formats including braille, large print, sign language interpretation videos, audio recordings, picture-based messages, and in easy-to-understand versions. Partner with disability organizations to co-design materials and dissemination strategies.
 Access to Legal Justice	Witness intimidation begins at police stations and continues through prosecution, with 59% of respondents conditioning testimony on protection program effectiveness.	Establish a Witness Protection Unit within the Ministry of Justice with dedicated staff and budget. Train police and prosecutors on witness safety procedures.	 Budget and Spending	GBV budget performance collapsed from 79% in 2023 to 27% in 2024, despite increasing total allocations from ₦694.5 million to ₦770 million.	Strengthen GBV budget execution by establishing clear implementation plans, ensuring timely fund release, and conducting regular performance reviews to translate allocations into impactful interventions.
	Churches, traditional rulers, and community groups pressure survivors to withdraw cases, transforming victims into social villains while perpetrators gain sympathy.	Launch a state-backed media campaign featuring traditional and religious leaders who support formal justice for GBV, countering narratives that frame forgiveness as superior to accountability. Include testimonies from survivors who found justice through formal systems.			
 Support Services	No operational SARC exists statewide.	Fast-track completion and operationalization of the three SARCs under construction with RoLAC by 2026.			
	Referral pathways show dramatic instability, with legal representation awareness collapsing from 38.1% to 14.9% and support group awareness dropping from 71.9% to 22.3%.	Develop and operationalize the planned online directory of GBV services within three months. Create printed referral pathway cards distributed at police stations, health facilities, courts, and community centres showing phone numbers, addresses, and services for all GBV response actors.			
	Primary healthcare centres provide counselling but lack systematic protocols for GBV medical care or forensic evidence collection.	Develop and disseminate standardized GBV medical response protocols to all primary healthcare centres and hospitals. Train healthcare workers on forensic evidence of collection, documentation, and survivor-centered care.			

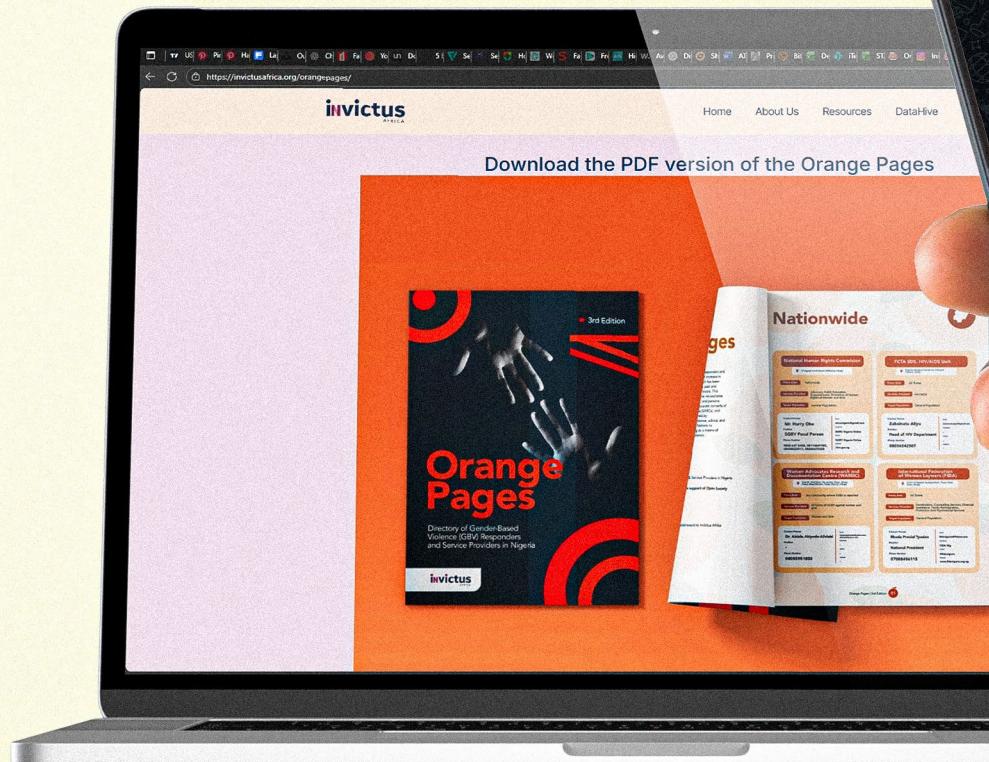


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