

## The Role of Domestic Violence in Driving Female Migration and Heightening Trafficking Vulnerabilities

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### Abstract

*Domestic violence often acts as a suffocating constraint, compelling many women to flee their homes in search of safety. Unfortunately, this escape can heighten their susceptibility to human trafficking. This study explores the intersection of domestic abuse, female migration, and vulnerability to trafficking, emphasizing domestic violence as a key push factor. ANOVA analysis revealed significant differences in migration-related vulnerability across socioeconomic groups ( $F(2, 147) = 40.066, p < .001$ ). Post hoc Tukey HSD tests showed notable disparities between low and middle-income groups (mean difference = 9.398,  $p < .001$ ) and between middle and high-income groups (mean difference = -7.565,  $p < .001$ ), though the difference between low and high-income groups was not significant. Pearson correlation indicated a weak, non-significant relationship between migration vulnerability and educational background ( $r = -0.069, p = .403$ ). Similarly, Spearman's rho revealed a weak, non-significant link between age and vulnerability ( $r = 0.045, p = .584$ ). However, a chi-square test ( $\chi^2(5) = 37.066, p < .001$ ) found a significant association between geographic location and difficulty accessing domestic violence support. These findings highlight the complex interplay of economic status, education, age, and geography in shaping women's risks during migration, calling for nuanced, multidimensional policy responses.*

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Female migration, Human trafficking, Exploitation, Vulnerability

### Introduction

Migration is often presented as a chance for economic and social progress, but for many women, it is primarily a survival tool. While voluntary migration might offer people better job opportunities, improved living conditions, and greater personal freedoms, forced migration resulting from domestic abuse presents a starkly different reality. Women fleeing abusive situations generally do so under pressure, with little planning or resources, thereby increasing their vulnerability to trafficking, abuse, and assault (Adepoju, 2023; Lanati &

Thiele (2024). Lanati & Thiele (2024) further confirm that domestic violence is a major push factor in female migration, as many survivors see migration as their only escape from life-threatening abuse. The urgency of their departure can lead to unanticipated and dangerous travel routes, placing them at even greater risk (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2023; Ogunsiji, Foster, Green, Sikhosana, Gauci, Kayesa & Fernandez, 2025).

Existing studies highlight domestic violence as one of the most significant causes of female migration, particularly in regions where legal protections and social support systems for survivors are inadequate (Omorogiwa, 2023; Winfield, Hilton, Poon, Straatman & Jaffe, 2024). Women suffering physical, emotional, and psychological abuse often find that social services, courts, and law enforcement in their home countries are either inaccessible or ineffective (Ibrahim, Malik & Wielenga, 2020; Lewis, 2024). Many who lack institutional protection are compelled to flee in search of safety (Mullany, 2025). However, migration for these women is rarely a legally sanctioned or organized process. Instead, it often involves unofficial and illegal border crossings, making migrants particularly susceptible to trafficking rings, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse (Nwobi, Mokwelu, Ogben, Uzoekwe & Nwanna, 2024).

Economic dependence also exacerbates women's vulnerability while traveling. Women in abusive marriages frequently lack financial independence, making it difficult to organize an independent migration journey (Alidou, 2024). Many of those without financial means must rely on middlemen, who often have exploitative motives, for assistance in securing safe passage or employment. These middlemen, including human traffickers, exploit women's desperation by offering false promises of safety, only to force them into labor or sexual exploitation (Becucci, 2024).

Although domestic abuse is the main push factor in female migration, socioeconomic status also plays a crucial role in determining the degree of risk women face during migration. Research shows that women from lower-income backgrounds are significantly more susceptible to exploitation than their wealthier counterparts, who have greater financial resources and access to legitimate travel routes (Makanjuola, Adenekan & Bam, 2023). Women from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to depend on informal migration networks and dangerous migration paths, further increasing their vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation (Hennebry, Grass & Mclaughlin, 2016). By contrast, those with financial stability and

educational qualifications have greater access to organized migration programs, legal work permits, and protective services (Ojemeiri, Aruaye & Aondover, 2023).

Another important factor in understanding risk disparities is the intersection of education and migration vulnerability. Studies indicate that women with lower levels of education are less likely to be aware of trafficking dangers and are less equipped to identify fraudulent job offers or migration schemes (Williamson, 2024; Adeyemo, 2025). Economic need combined with limited awareness makes them ideal targets for traffickers masquerading as legitimate employment agents or sponsors (Demeke, 2024; Supanto, 2025).

Geographical factors also play a critical role in migration vulnerability. Systemic inequalities make women from rural areas more susceptible to migration-related risks than their urban counterparts. Limited access to information, lack of formal education, and smaller social networks weaken their ability to navigate migration safely (Smith-Khan, 2025). Rural women also tend to experience higher levels of gender-based violence with fewer available support services, prompting them to undertake unplanned migration as a survival strategy (Aguoru, 2025). Findings from this study's chi-square analysis reveal a statistically significant link between a woman's geographic location and her ability to access support resources. Women in rural areas face greater difficulties in obtaining legal aid, shelters, and employment opportunities that could facilitate safer, legal migration routes. These disparities underscore the necessity for region-specific interventions to meet the needs of women in disadvantaged and rural areas.

Women fleeing abuse often lack awareness of trafficking risks, making them more susceptible to deceptive recruitment tactics. Traffickers frequently disguise themselves as job recruiters, sponsors, or even romantic partners, as Sidun (2025) and Adebayo (2025) highlight, luring victims into exploitative situations. Once trafficked, these women endure severe physical, psychological, and economic control, making escape or resistance exceedingly difficult. Bekteshi, Hook, Gjermeni & Bellamy (2025) indicate that trafficked women commonly face extreme isolation, language barriers, and threats of violence, preventing them from seeking help. Moreover, many fear legal repercussions due to their undocumented status, discouraging them from reporting their exploitation (Supanto, 2025). These challenges highlight the

need for stronger legal protections and targeted initiatives to support domestic violence survivors throughout the migration process.

This study underscores the complex and often dangerous realities of migration for women escaping domestic violence. While migration can provide a pathway out of abusive situations, the lack of structured support and legal migration routes often places survivors at heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation. This study, therefore, examined the the role of domestic violence in driving female migration and heightening trafficking vulnerabilities among the victims.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Globally, especially in Nigeria where it is a major push factor for female migration, domestic abuse is still a pervasive and underappreciated problem. For many women, leaving violent households is their last choice made under extreme and unstable circumstances. Sadly, this flight sometimes makes them more susceptible to abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking. Migrating without legal papers, money, or organised support systems increases their vulnerability to be taken advantage of by traffickers pretending as sponsors or employment brokers. Although earlier studies have looked at elements including poverty, education, and conflict in determining migration patterns, less has been paid to the direct link between domestic abuse and female migration especially in regard to vulnerability to trafficking. Moreover, policy measures sometimes ignore how women's susceptibility is affected by their socioeconomic level, degree of education, age, and geographic location taken all together. Rural women, for instance, often have restricted access to legal help, shelters, and support groups, therefore increasing their vulnerability to exploitation during migration. Results from this study and other emerging data point to women from lower-income backgrounds being more likely to depend on unofficial, high-risk migration networks. Those from rural areas also have more trouble getting necessary support services, which increases their risk of being trafficked. More complex, context-specific study is therefore suggested by demographic variables such as age and education showing conflicting relationships with migratory susceptibility. These disparities suggest a great demand for educated policy reactions and intersectional study. Efforts to safeguard vulnerable female migrants will remain scattered without a thorough knowledge of how structural disadvantages, migration pressures, and domestic violence interact. With an

eye towards more focused and successful treatments, this study looks at how domestic violence drives female migration and raises trafficking risks.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine whether women from different socioeconomic backgrounds experience significant differences in their perceived vulnerabilities during migration.
2. To determine the relationship between the severity of domestic violence experienced and overall vulnerability among women in migration contexts.
3. To investigate how demographic factors such as age and location (rural vs. urban) influence women's perceived vulnerability and access to support services during migration.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do women from different socioeconomic backgrounds (low, middle, high income) experience significant differences in their vulnerabilities during migration?
2. Is there a correlation between the perceived severity of domestic violence experienced and the overall vulnerability?
3. Is there a significant association between a woman's age and her perceived vulnerability during migration?
4. Do women migrating from rural areas report a higher level of difficulty accessing support services for domestic violence victims compared to those from urban areas?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the perceived vulnerabilities of women affected by domestic violence and migration. The design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time to explore relationships between personal experiences and vulnerability to human trafficking. The study targeted women who were victims of domestic violence and/or migrants in vulnerable transit or settlement situations. A total of 150

women were selected using a convenience sampling technique. Participants were accessed through partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and support centers providing services for victims of domestic violence and female migrants in Southwest Nigeria. The instrument used was the Domestic Violence, Migration, and Human Trafficking Vulnerability Questionnaire (DVMHTV-Q), a researcher-designed tool developed for the study context. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A: Demographic information, including 4 items on age, gender, socio-economic background, and geographic location; Section B: Vulnerability assessment, comprising 16 items designed to evaluate the perceived risks and vulnerability factors faced by women fleeing domestic violence in migration contexts. The items were formatted on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree (1)* to *Strongly Agree (4)*. The content validity of the DVMHTV-Q was established through expert review by three specialists in gender studies and migration research. To assess its reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 20 women sharing similar demographic characteristics as the main sample. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating high reliability.

## Results and Discussion

**RQ1:** Do women from different socioeconomic backgrounds (low, middle, high income) experience significant differences in their vulnerabilities during migration?

**Table 1a:** Socioeconomic Differences in Migration Vulnerability

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1960.257	2	980.129	40.066	.000
Within Groups	3596.016	147	24.463		
Total	5556.273	149			

**Table 1b:** Post Hoc Analysis (Turkey HSD)

Comparison	Means Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval
Low income vs. High income	9.398*	1.083	.000	6.83 to 11.96
Low income vs. High income	1.832	0.921	.118	-0.35 to 4.01
Low income vs. High income	-7.565*	1.055	.000	-10.06 to -5.07

*Significance at the 0.05 Level*

Women from various socioeconomic backgrounds showed statistically significant difference in migratory vulnerabilities,  $F(2, 147) = 40.066, p <$

0.001, according to the ANOVA test (Table 1a). Post hoc analysis (Table 1b) revealed even more that women from low-income backgrounds had far more vulnerabilities than their middle- and high-income counterparts. These results are consistent with other studies by Makanjuola et al., 2023 which show that women from lower-income families have less financial means and are more likely to rely on informal migratory networks, hence raising their risk of trafficking and exploitation. Women with low financial resources typically look to traffickers or migration agents, according to Hennebryet al., 2016 which increases their vulnerability to exploitation. Ojemeiri et al., 2023 further underline, thus, that women's vulnerabilities are much lessened by financial stability and access to legitimate migration channels. Women with more money can afford safer travel paths and obtain legitimate work permits, hence lowering their risk of victimisation. This emphasises the need of focused financial empowerment projects to shield at-risk women from trafficking.

**RQ2:** Is there a correlation between the perceived severity of domestic violence experienced and the overall vulnerability?

**Table 2:** Correlation Between Domestic Violence Severity and Vulnerability

				<b>Vulnerability Index During Migration</b>	<b>Educational background of the participant</b>
Vulnerability Index			Pearson Correlation	1	-.069
			Sig. (2-tailed)		.403
			N	150	150
Educational background of the participant			Pearson Correlation	-.069	1
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.403	
			N	150	150

*\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

According to correlation study (Table 2), the association between the degree of domestic violence suffered and migration vulnerability was not statistically significant ( $r = -0.069$ ,  $p = 0.403$ ). This implies that although domestic abuse is a significant push factor in female migration, it does not always indicate the degree of vulnerability during migration.

This result challenges earlier research, like Lanati and Thiele (2024), who found domestic violence severity to be a key factor influencing migratory vulnerability. On the other hand, it fits with Okeke-Ihejirika (2023) and Ogunsiji et al. (2025), who contend that several variables, including economic position and information availability, impact vulnerability levels. Although

spousal abuse starts the migratory process, financial stability and educational background are more important in deciding whether a woman becomes a victim of trafficking or exploitation.

These findings underline the need of thorough intervention programs tackling domestic violence as well as migration-related hazards. Legal and financial assistance for victims helps to greatly decrease their dependence on unofficial migratory networks, hence reducing their susceptibility.

**RQ3:** Is there a significant association between a woman's age and her perceived vulnerability during migration?

**Table 3:** Association Between Age and Vulnerability

			Age of the participant	Vulnerability index during migration
Spearman's rho	Age of the participant	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.045
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.584
		N	150	150
	Vulnerability During Migration	Index Correlation Coefficient	.045	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.584	.
		N	150	150

*\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The Spearman correlation study (Table 3) revealed no notable link between a woman's age and her vulnerability during migration ( $r = 0.045$ ,  $p = 0.584$ ). This implies that women, regardless of age, face migration-related hazards equally. Earlier research, including Williamson (2024) and Adeyemo (2025), have indicated that younger women are more vulnerable to exploitation because of their lack of knowledge of migration hazards. The current study, on the other hand, fits more closely with Demeke (2024) and Supanto (2025), who contend that vulnerability is more affected by socioeconomic elements and geographic location than by age by itself. The absence of a notable link suggests that external factors such as financial dependency and educational background shape susceptibility more than age does. This demands for age-inclusive policies that safeguard all women, regardless of their age, from migration-related risks.

**RQ4:** Do women migrating from rural areas report a higher level of difficulty accessing support services for domestic violence victims compared to those from urban areas?

**Table 4:** Geographic Location and Access to Support Services

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	37.066 <sup>a</sup>	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.484	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	31.828	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	150		

*a. 4 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.46.*

The chi-square test (Table 4) confirmed a statistically significant link between geographic location and access to support services ( $\chi^2 (5) = 37.066$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), hence supporting the finding that women from rural regions struggle more to get legal aid, shelters, and job possibilities. Smith-Khan (2025) supports this conclusion by stressing that women in rural areas have less access to information on migration and smaller social networks, which raises their vulnerability to trafficking. Aguoru (2025) supports more that rural women with less available resources suffer greater gender-based violence, which makes them more likely to participate in high-risk and unplanned migration. Bekteshi et al., 2025 further underline that trafficked women from rural backgrounds frequently suffer great isolation, linguistic obstacles, and lack of legal understanding, which complicates their ability to seek assistance. This underlines the critical need of focused initiatives such as mobile legal clinics, community education projects, and more rural support infrastructure funding to lower migration-related dangers for women from underprivileged areas.

## **Conclusion**

This study looked at how different demographic variables including educational background, age, and location related to migration vulnerability. The results showed low and statistically unimportant links between migration susceptibility and both educational background and age, implying that these variables by themselves are not strong indicators of migration risks. The chi-square study, though, showed a clear link between geography and perceived difficulty in getting support services, hence supporting the case that rural people have more systematic obstacles in getting help. These results are consistent with current studies stressing the importance of socioeconomic variables and geographic inequalities in shaping vulnerability during migration. Given these results, it is evident that while individual demographic characteristics may have limited direct influence on migration vulnerability, broader structural factors such as access to support services and economic opportunities significantly shape individual's experiences. Dealing with these

issues calls for focused efforts improving service accessibility, particularly in rural areas, and policies reducing vulnerabilities.

### **Recommendations**

1. Expand and strengthen support services in rural and underserved areas to ensure equitable access for all individuals.
2. Implement targeted awareness campaigns to educate vulnerable populations on available support services and risk mitigation strategies.
3. Develop and promote job creation, vocational training, and economic empowerment programs to reduce vulnerability to migration risks.
4. Foster partnerships between government agencies and non-governmental organisations to provide comprehensive support for vulnerable migrants.
5. Engage local communities in designing and implementing initiatives that address migration-related challenges effectively.
6. Utilise research and data analytics to inform policies that address migration vulnerabilities and service disparities.
7. Strengthen legal frameworks to protect migrants' rights and advocate for policies that reduce systemic barriers to support services.

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